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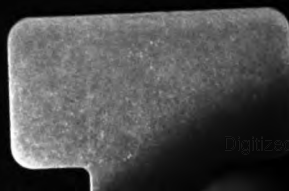
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THE
PULPIT COMMENTARY,

EDITED BY THE

REV. CANON H. D. M. SPENCE, M.A.,
VICAR AND RURAL DEAN OF ST. PANCRAS, AND EXAMINING CHAPLAIN TO THE LORD
BISHOP OF GLOUCESTER AND BRISTOL ;

AND BY THE

REV. JOSEPH S. EXELL,
EDITOR OF 'THE HOMILETIC QUARTERLY.'

WITH

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THE BOOK OF JUDGES.

INTRODUCTION.

THE Book of Judges, called in Hebrew שופטים,¹ in the Septuagint ΚΡΙΤΑΙ, and in the Vulgate LIBER JUDICUM, or JUDICES, takes its name, like the other historical books,—the five Books of Moses, the Book of Joshua, the Book of Ruth, the Books of Samuel and of the Kings, the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah, and the Book of Esther,—from its contents, viz., the history of certain transactions which took place in Israel under the judges. The judges were those extraordinary civil and military rulers who governed Israel in the interval between the death of Joshua and the foundation of the kingdom of Israel; except only that the judgeship of Samuel was a kind of connecting link between the two—Samuel himself being a judge, though of a different character from those that preceded him, and his government merging in the latter part of it into the kingdom of Saul; so that the times of Samuel occupy a middle place between the Judges and the Kings, belonging partly to both, but wholly to neither.

The age of the world in which the transactions recorded in the Book of Judges occurred was somewhere between the years B.C. 1500 and 1000. It was one marked by the same peculiar features in different parts of the earth. It was the dim twilight of history; but, as far as we can judge from those mythological accounts which precede the existence of true history, it was a time of much movement, of the birth of heroic characters, and of the incipient formation of those nations who were destined to be foremost among the nations of the earth. The mythologies of Greece tell of exploits of heroes which imply unsettled and disturbed times, the clashing of race with race, fierce struggles for the possession of lands, terrible conflicts for dominion or existence. And as far as such mythologies contain, as they doubtless do, some shreds of historical truth, and reflect something of the character of the men of the period, they are in accordance with the picture contained in the Book of Judges of the times which were more or less contemporary. Instead of a comparison of the Greek mythologies leading to the

¹ This is the same word as the Carthaginian *Suffetes*, as their chief magistrates are called (Liv., Hist., xxvii. 37). The Tyrians had a similar name for their magistrates, translated by Josephus (App., i. 21) *δικασται*.

conclusion that the history in the Book of Judges is mythological also, it rather lends a valuable confirmation of that historical character which the internal evidence of the book so abundantly claims for it. The features which are common to the Greek mythologies and the Hebrew history, the wars of new settlers with the old inhabitants, the recklessness of human life, the fierce cruelty under excitement, the heroic deeds and wild adventures of a few great leaders, the taste for riddles, the habit of making vows, the interference of gods and angels in human affairs, the frequent consultations of oracles, and so on, are the products of the same general condition of human society at the same epoch of the world. The difference between the two is, that the Greek traditions have passed through the hands of countless poets and story-tellers, who in the course of generations altered, added, embellished, confused, distorted, and invented, according to their own fertile fancy and their own creative imaginations; while the Hebrew records, by the special providence of God, have been preserved some 3000 years and upwards uncorrupted and unchanged.

CHRONOLOGY.

The first thing one looks for in a scientific history is a careful and accurate chronology. But such is entirely wanting in the Book of Judges, for the reason that it is not a scientific history, but a collection of narratives having a moral and religious purpose; illustrative, that is, of the evil of idolatry, of God's providential government of the world, and of his special rule over the chosen race of Israel. We are obliged, therefore, to construct our chronology out of the indications which every true history contains in itself of the sequence and connection of events. But these are necessarily inexact, and cannot always be made to determine the time within a century or more, especially when there is no accurate contemporary history. There are also special circumstances which increase the difficulty in the case of the Judges. The date of Joshua's death, which is the *terminus a quo* of the book, is uncertain by about 200 years. Then the time occupied by the elders who outlived Joshua, which intervened before the action of the book commences, is indefinite; it may mean ten years, or it may mean thirty or forty years. Again, the point of junction of the close of the book with 1 Samuel which follows it is uncertain; we do not know certainly how far the latest events in the judgeship of Samson ran into the judgeships of Eli and Samuel. But there is another element of uncertainty which largely affects the chronology of the Book of Judges. The history is not the history of one kingdom or commonwealth, but of several almost separate and independent tribes. Except on great occasions, such as the national gathering at Mizpeh (and that was very soon after the death of Joshua), Gilead, i. e. the tribes to the east of Jordan, had little communication with Western Israel; and even on the west of Jordan, Ephraim and the northern tribes were divided from Judah and Simeon and Dan on the south. The great tribe of Judah is not so much as mentioned in the enumeration of the tribes which fought under Barak, nor in the victories of Gideon. Hence it is

apparent that it is at least very possible that some of the events narrated may be not consecutive, but synchronous; that wars may have been going on in one part of Israel while another part was at rest; and that we may possibly be led into as great a chronological blunder by adding together all the different servitudes and rests, as a reader of English history would be if he made the reigns of the Anglo-Saxon kings of the heptarchy consecutive instead of simultaneous.

And there is yet another cause of uncertainty as to the chronology. Long periods of eighty and forty years are named without a single event being recorded in them. Now it is notorious that numbers are peculiarly liable to be corrupted in Hebrew manuscripts, as, *e. g.*, in the familiar example of 1 Sam. vi. 19; so that those numbers are very uncertain, and not to be depended upon.

On all these accounts an accurate and certain chronology is, in our present state of knowledge, impossible. There is, however, one source, though not in the Book of Judges itself, from which we may fairly look for some more certain help, and that is from those genealogies which span the time occupied by this history. The chief of these is the genealogy of David appended to the Book of Ruth, repeated in the First Book of Chronicles, and again reproduced in the Gospels of St. Matthew and St. Luke. This genealogy gives three generations between Salmon, who was a young man at the time of the occupation of Canaan, and David. These three are, however, about equivalent to five, when we take into account the age of Boaz at his marriage with Ruth, and the probable age of Jesse at the birth of David. They may also admit of some further extension, if Salmon, whose exact age at the entrance into Canaan we do not know, did not beget Boaz till ten or more years afterwards, and if Jesse was a younger son of Obed. Reckoning, however, the generations as *five*, and allowing thirty-three years for a generation, we get $5 \times 33 = 165$ as the approximate length of the period from the entrance into Canaan to the birth of David; and, deducting thirty years for the time of Joshua and the elders, 135 years from the beginning of the times of the judges to the birth of David. But this is probably rather too short, because, if we turn to other genealogies covering the same period, we find that the generations between those who were grown men at the entrance into Canaan and those who were David's contemporaries were six or seven, as in the genealogy of the high priests given in 1 Chron. vi., where there are seven generations between Phinehas and Zadok the son of Ahitub. Again, the list of Edomitish kings in Gen. xxxvi. and 1 Chron. i. 43, &c., gives eight kings as having reigned before Saul was king of Israel, the last of them being Saul's contemporary, and one of them being king at the time of the exodus. If he was the first king, that would give six between the entrance into Canaan and David. The genealogy of Zabad (1 Chron. ii. 36, &c.) gives six or seven between the entrance into Canaan and David.

And it may be said on the whole, that of *nine*¹ genealogies, *eight* agree in

¹ The nine genealogies are those of Zadok, Heman, Ahimoth, Asaph, Ethan, Abiathar, Saul, Zabad, and the Edomitish kings.

requiring the addition of one or two generations to the *five* indicated by David's, while not one requires a larger number. The genealogy of Saul is of the same length as David's. If *six* is the true number, we have a period of 198 years between the entrance into Canaan and the birth of David. If *seven* is the true number, we get 221 years. Deducting thirty years for Joshua and the elders, and (say) ten years for the interval between the close of the times of the judges and the birth of David, we get in the first case 158 years as the time of the judges (198—40), and in the second 191 (231—40). But the consent of all the genealogies seems to preclude the possibility of such long periods as 400, 500, 600, and even 700 years, which some chronologists assign to the interval between the entrance into Canaan and the building of Solomon's temple.¹

As regards the age in the world's history to which the events of the Book of Judges belong, we get at it by reckoning backwards from the birth of David. This may be assigned with some confidence to about the year B.C. 1083. If then we assume ten years to have elapsed between the close of the period of the judges and the birth of David, we get the year B.C. 1093 as the date of the end of the period of the judges; and if we then assume 158 years as the duration of the times of the judges, we get $1093 + 158 = 1251$ as the date of the commencement of the times of the judges; and if we then add thirty years for Joshua and the elders, and forty years for the sojourning in the wilderness, we get $(1251 + 30 + 40)$ 1321 for the date of the exodus, which is within eight years of the Jewish traditional date B.C. 1313, and brings us to the reign of Menephthah, or Menephthes, who is the most probable Pharaoh of the exodus who has been proposed. This is a considerable support to the system of chronology here advocated.

STRUCTURE AND CONTENTS OF THE BOOK.

It has already been remarked that the history is not that of one united people, but of several separate tribes. The truth of this remark will appear if we consider the great length and detail of some of the narratives, quite out of proportion to their importance relatively to the whole Israelitish nation, but quite natural when we look upon them as parts of the annals of particular tribes. The preservation of Deborah's magnificent ode, the full details of the history of Gideon, the long story of Abimelech's reign, the highly interesting narrative of the birth and adventures of Samson, the detached accounts of the expedition of the Danites, and of the fall of the tribe of Benjamin, which close the book, are probably all due to the fact of their being taken from existing records of the several tribes. These were all brought into *harmony* and unity of purpose by the compiler, who selected (under the guidance of the Holy Spirit) those portions which bore upon his main purpose, which was to denounce idolatry, to confirm the Israelites in the service of the Lord the God of their fathers, and to illustrate the faithfulness, the

¹ Keil makes 533 years from the entrance into Canaan to the building of Solomon's temple, assuming the 300 years of Judges xi. 26 to be a real date.

mercy, and the power of their covenant God. And certainly if anything could confirm a fickle people in their faith and obedience to the living and true God, the exhibition of such deliverances as those from the Canaanite and Midianite and Ammonite invasions, and of such examples of faith and constancy as those of Barak, Gideon, and Jephthah, were well calculated to do so.

And this leads us to observe a very important feature which the Book of Judges has in common with the later historical books, viz., the union of contemporary narratives and documents with late editorship. The method of the Hebrew historical writers seems to have been to incorporate into their work large portions of the ancient materials without altering them, only adding occasional remarks of their own. The method of modern historians has usually been to read for themselves all the ancient authorities, and then to give the result in their own words. The information got from a variety of authors is all welded together, the unimportant details are omitted, and a harmonious whole, reflecting the author's mind perhaps quite as much as that of the original authorities, is presented to the reader. But the Hebrew method was different. The ancient records, the Book of the wars of the Lord, the Book of Jasher, the Chronicles of the kingdom, the visions of Iddo the Seer, the Book of the Acts of Solomon, the Chronicles of the kings of Judah, and so on, were searched, and whatever was required for the author's purpose was inserted bodily in his work. Hence in the Book of Kings the lengthened episodes concerning Elijah and Elisha, the great length at which the reign of David is given in the Books of Samuel, and so on. This same method is very apparent in the Book of Judges. It seems scarcely open to doubt that the mass of the book consists of the original contemporary annals of the different tribes. The minute and graphic details of the narratives, Deborah's song, Jotham's fable, Jephthah's message to the king of Ammon, the exact description of the great Parliament at Mizpeh, and many other like portions of the book, must be contemporary documents. Then, again, the history of Samson the Danite, and that of the Danite expedition to Laish, indicate strongly the annals of the tribe of Dan as their common source; while the importance attached to Gilead in chs. x., xi., and xii. points to annals of Gilead. But at the same time the presence of a compiler and editor of these various documents is distinctly visible in those prefatory remarks contained in ch. ii. 10—19; iii. 1—7, which review, as it were, the whole subsequent narrative, as well as in casual observations thrown in from time to time, as at ch. xvii. 6; xviii. 1; xix. 1; xx. 27, 28; xxi. 25, and in the general arrangement of the materials.

This sketch of the structure and contents of the Book of Judges must not be concluded without mentioning the light thrown upon the condition of the neighbouring nations, the Canaanite tribes, Mesopotamia, the Philistines, the Moabites and Ammonites, the Amalekites, the Midianites, and the Sidonians. Nor must a brief reference be omitted to the repeated angelophanies, as in ch. ii. 1; vi. 11—23; xiii. 3, &c. Again, we find the great institution of prophecy existing, as in ch. iv. 4; vi. 8, and, in a certain sense, wherever the Spirit of the Lord came upon a

judge, as ch. iii. 10; vi. 34; xi. 29, &c. In other passages where the word of God comes to men it is not clear whether it is through prophets, through an ephod, or by direct operation of the Holy Ghost (see ch. ii. 20; vi. 25; x. 11; &c.).

It is also worthy of observation that there are in this book many direct references to the law and the books of Moses. The inquiry of the Lord (ch. i. 1; xx. 27); the mention of the commandments "which God gave by the hand of Moses" (ch. iii. 4); the allusion to the exodus, and to the very words of Exod. xx. 2 (ch. vi. 8, 13); the dismissal by Gideon of all that were fearful according to Deut. xx. 8 (ch. vii. 3); the lengthened reference to the history in Numb. and Deut. (ch. xi. 15—26); the institution of Nazarites (ch. xiii. 5; xvi. 17); the mention of the tabernacle and the ark (ch. xviii. 31; xx. 27, 28); the reference to the high priest and to the Levites as the ministers of God (ch. xvii. 13; xix. 18; xx. 28), are among the many proofs that the law of Moses was known to the writer or compiler of the Book of Judges.

We must look, therefore, to some other cause for the singular silence in this history concerning the services of the tabernacle, and the high priests after Phinehas, and that change in the line of the high priests which must have taken place in the time of the judges between Phinehas of the line of Eleazar and Eli of the line of Ithamar. There must have been in all probability two or three high priests between Phinehas and Eli, whose names are not recorded, at least not as high priests. Josephus, however, says that Abiahna (whose name is corrupted by him into Josepus) was high priest after Phinehas, and that Eli succeeded Josepus, being the first high priest of the house of Ithamar, and that the other descendants of Phinehas named in the genealogy of the high priests (1 Chron. vi. 4—8) remained in private life till Zadok was made high priest by David. However this may be, it is certainly strange that not a single allusion to a high priest occurs in the whole book except that one in ch. xx. 28, while Phinehas was still alive. Perhaps the explanation is, that in the de-centralisation of Israel above spoken of the central worship at Shiloh lost its influence (as Jerusalem did after the ten tribes had revolted from the house of David); that in the troubled times that followed each tribe or cluster of tribes set up its own worship, and had its own priest and ephod; and that the descendants of Phinehas were weak men who could not make the priesthood respected, or even retain it in their own families. Add to these considerations that the narratives are all taken from tribal annals; that apparently not one is taken from the annals of the tribe of Ephraim (in which Shiloh was), seeing that in them all the great tribe of Ephraim appears to disadvantage; and, lastly, that we have in this book not a regular history of Israel, but a collection of narratives selected on account of their bearing on the author's main design, and we have perhaps a sufficient explanation of what at first appears strange, viz., the absence of all mention of the high priests in the body of the book.

The book consists of three parts: the preface, ch. i. to ch. iii. 6; the main body of the narrative, from ch. iii. 7 to the end of ch. xvi.; the appendix, containing the separate and isolated narratives concerning the settlement of the Danites and

the civil war with Benjamin, and belonging chronologically to the very beginning of the narrative, very shortly after Joshua's death. The preface dovetails in an extraordinary manner into the Book of Joshua,—which, or the materials from which it was composed, the compiler must have had before him,—and probably also into 1 Samuel.

DATE OF COMPILATION.

There is nothing peculiar in the language (except some strange architectural terms in ch. iii. in the part relating to Ehud, and some rare words in Deborah's song, in ch. v.) from which to gather the date of compilation. But from the phrase in ch. xviii. 31, "all the time that the house of God was in Shiloh," and that in ch. xx. 27, "the ark of the covenant of God was there in those days," and from the description of the situation of Shiloh (ch. xxi. 19), it is quite certain that it was made after the removal of the ark from Shiloh. From the repeated phrase (ch. xvii. 6; xviii. 1; xix. 1; xxi. 25) that "in those days there was no king in Israel," it seems equally certain that it was made after the foundation of the kingdom by Saul; while the mention of the Jebusites in ch. i. 21 as dwelling in Jerusalem "unto this day" points to a time prior to David. On the other hand, the phrase (ch. xviii. 30) "until the day of the captivity of the land" would make it probable that it was written after the deportation of the ten tribes, when it is likely the settlement at Dan was broken up by the Assyrian conqueror. This might be in the reign of Jotham or Ahaz. There does not seem to be any other special mark of time in the book itself.

But, on the other hand, the allusions to the Book of Judges, or to events which are recorded in it, in other books of the Old Testament must be taken into account. In 1 Sam. xii. 9—11 there are not only allusions to the events which form the subject of Judges iii., iv., vi., vii., viii.; x. 7, 10; xi., but *verbal* quotations which make it morally certain that the writer of 1 Sam. had before him the very words which we now read in Judges iii. 7, 8; iv. 2; x. 10, 15, and probably the whole narratives as they are now contained in Judges. It necessarily follows that either the Book of Judges was already compiled when Samuel spake these words, or that Samuel had access to the identical documents which the compiler of Judges afterwards incorporated in his book. The same argument applies to 2 Sam. xi. 21, where the verbal quotation is exact. In Isa. ix. 4; x. 26, spoken in the reign of Ahaz, the reference is more general, though in the last passage there is the production of three words from Judges vii. 25—*upon*, or *at* (Heb. *ʔ*), *the rock Oreb*. Again, in Ps. lxxxiii. 9—11 there is a distinct reference to the narrative in Judges vii., viii.; and in Ps. lxxviii. 56, &c., and cvi. 34, 45, there is a general reference to the times of the judges, as to one the history of which was well known. Taking, however, into account the fact that all the three psalms are of uncertain date, no very distinct argument can be brought to bear from them on the date of Judges. On the whole then it would meet all the requirements of the passages in the Book of Judges (except the reference to the captivity of the ten tribes), and in the other books in which reference is made to Judges, if we were to assign

the compilation to the reign of Saul, the separate contents of the book being known even earlier ; but it must be confessed that this conclusion is uncertain, and that there is much to be said in favour of a much later date.

The Book of Judges has always been contained in the canon. It is referred to in Acts xiii. 20, and Heb. xi. 32.

Note.—The chronology indicated in Judges xi. 26 has not been taken into account for the reasons given in the note on that passage ; that in 1 Kings vi. 1 because it is generally given up by critics and commentators as an interpolation, and is unsupported by the Book of Chronicles and by Josephus ; and that of the A. V. of Acts xiii. 20 because the true reading, "happily restored by Lachmann from the oldest MSS., A. B. C., and supported by the Latin, Coptic, Armenian, and Sahidic Versions, and by Chrysostom" (Bp. Wordsworth in *l. c.*), gives quite a different sense : "he divided their land to them by lot in about 450 years"—from the time, *i. e.*, when he made the promise to Abraham.

LITERATURE OF THE BOOK.

COMMENTARIES ON THE BOOK OF JUDGES, AND OTHER NOTICES.

ROSENMÜLLER'S 'Scholia,' in Latin (1835), are very useful both for the Hebrew scholar, and generally for exegesis, and historical and other illustrations. He speaks very highly of the Commentary of Sebastian Schmidt. DE WETTE'S 'Introduction to the Old Testament' (English translation, 1858) contains some valuable remarks, but must be used with caution. He refers to the commentaries of Schnurrer, Bonfrere, Le Clerc, Maurer, and others. BERTHEAU, in the 'Kurtzgefasstes Exegetisches Handbuch' (1845), is, as always, very able, very learned, and exhibits much critical acumen. The commentary of KEIL and DELITZSCH (English translation, 1865) is useful, and orthodox, but deficient in critical discernment. It frequently differs from Bertheau. It has the advantage of acquaintance with the discoveries of the most recent travellers. HENGSTENBERG ('Dissertation on the Pentateuch') may also be consulted. POOLE'S Synopsis gives the views of the earlier commentators. Of English commentators it may suffice to mention Bishop Patrick, Bishop Wordsworth, and the 'Speaker's Commentary.' Bishop Wordsworth's list of the chief commentators among the Fathers contains the names of Origen, Theodoret, Augustine, Procopius, Isidore, and Bede ; and among the Jewish commentators those of Kimchi, Aben Ezra, and Jarchi. Of other books most useful in helping to understand the scenes where the dramatic action of the Judges took place, may be mentioned especially Stanley's 'Sinai and Palestine ;' also Robinson's 'Biblical Researches,' and the geographical articles in the 'Dictionary of the Bible ;' Van de Velde's map, and especially the new 'Great Map of Western Palestine' by the Palestine Exploration Committee, from the recent survey, on the scale of an inch to a mile. For historical purposes Josephus's 'Jewish Antiquities' should be studied throughout, though he does not throw much additional light upon the narrative. Stanley's 'Lectures on the Jewish Church' contribute much vivid and picturesque description of the persons and scenes, and give great reality and fulness to the narrative. The historical articles in the 'Dictionary of the Bible' may also be consulted with advantage. Bishop Lowth, on Hebrew poetry, has some striking remarks on the song of Deborah, and Milton's 'Samson Agonistes,' besides its beauty as a poem, is a really good commentary on the history of Samson. For the very difficult chronology of the times of the Judges the reader may consult, besides the above-named commentaries, Jackson's 'Chronological Antiquities,' and Hale's 'Analysis of Chronology ;' and, for the system adopted in this commentary, Lepsius's 'Letters on Egypt and Ethiopia,' Wilkinson's 'Manners and Customs of the Egyptians,' and the present writer's chapter on 'The Discordance between Genealogy and Chronology of Judges,' in his work on the genealogies of our Lord Jesus Christ.

THE BOOK OF JUDGES.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER I.

Ver. 1.—*After the death of Joshua.* The events narrated in cha. i. and ii. 1—9 all occurred before the death of Joshua, as appears by ch. ii. 8, 9, and by a comparison of Josh. xiv. 6—15 and xv. 13—20. The words, *and it came to pass after the death of Joshua*, must therefore be understood (if the text is incorrupt) as the heading of the whole book, just as the Book of Joshua has for its heading, “Now after the death of Moses the servant of the Lord it came to pass.” *Asked the Lord.* The same phrase as ch. xviii. 5; xx. 18, where it is rendered *asked counsel of*. So also Numb. xxvii. 21, where a special direction is given to Joshua to make such inquiries as that mentioned in this verse before Eleazar the priest, through the judgment of Urim and Thummim (cf. 1 Sam. xxiii. 10, 12). A still more common rendering of the Hebrew phrase in the A. V. is “to inquire of God” (see, e. g. ch. xx. 27,

28; 1 Sam. xxii. 13, 15; xxiii. 2, 4; xxviii. 6, and many other places). Such inquiries were made (1) by Urim and Thummim, (2) by the word of the Lord through a prophet (1 Sam. ix. 9), or (3) simply by prayer, (Gen. xxv. 22), and improperly of false gods (2 Kings i. 2, 16), of teraphim, and semi-idolatrous priests (ch. xviii. 5, 14).

Ver. 5.—*Bezek.* The site of it is unknown; it is thought to be a different place from the *Bezek* of 1 Sam. xi. 8. *Adonibezek* means *the lord of Bezek*. He was the conqueror of seventy petty kings.

Ver. 6.—*Cut off his thumbs*, &c. These cruel mutilations, like the still more cruel one of putting out the eyes (ch. xvi. 21; Numb. xvi. 14; 1 Sam. xi. 2; 2 Kings xxv. 7), were intended to cripple the warrior in his speed, and to incapacitate him from the use of the bow, or sword, or spear, while yet sparing his life, either in mercy, or for the purpose of retaining his services for the conqueror.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—7.—*Inquiry of God.* Three lessons stand out from the above section which we shall do well to consider in the order in which they present themselves.

I. The *first* is, THAT BEFORE TAKING IN HAND ANY IMPORTANT BUSINESS WE OUGHT TO SEEK GOD'S DIRECTION. Distrust of our own wisdom, misgivings as to our motives, and the feeling that the issues of all events are in the hands of God's unerring providence, should always prompt us to look to God for guidance. Even when we do so no little care is needed to be sure that our interpretations of God's will are not biassed by our inclinations. We read in Jer. xlii. that the captains of the forces of the remnant of the Jews went to Jeremiah after the deportation of their countrymen to Babylon, and said to him, “Pray for us unto the Lord thy God, that he may show us the way wherein we may walk, and the thing that we may do,” and even bound themselves by a solemn oath to obey the voice of the Lord, and do whatsoever he should command them by the mouth of Jeremiah. But when, after ten days, God's answer came, bidding them abide in the land of Judah, and condemning in distinct

JUDGES.

B

terms the course on which their hearts were set, viz., to go down to Egypt, they boldly accused Jeremiah of falsehood, and went down to Egypt in spite of his prophetic message. And so it too often is. Men ask God's direction, hoping that the answer will be in accordance with their own inclinations, and do their best to twist it into such accordance. But if this is impossible they act in bold defiance of it. In seeking God's guidance, therefore, especial care should be taken so to mortify our self-will that we may be ready to act upon the answer of God, however contrary it may be to the dictates of our own hearts. This may be applied to cases where pecuniary loss, or sacrifice of worldly advantages or pleasures, or self-humiliation and self-denial, or mortification of enmities, resentment, jealousy, pride, vanity, love of praise, and so on, are involved in an entire obedience to the dictates of the word and Spirit of God given in answer to prayer. As regards the ways in which a Christian now can "ask the Lord" concerning the course he ought to pursue on any particular occasion, we may say, following the analogy of the inquiries to which our text refers, that—1. He may inquire or *ask counsel of Holy Scripture*. He may seek light and truth from that word which is the expression of the mind and will of God. There is no state of darkness, or perplexity as to the true path of duty, to which Holy Scripture, wisely and prayerfully interrogated, will not bring satisfactory light: no question of morality or conduct on which it will not shed the ray of truth. The old superstition of the *sortes Virgilianæ* applied to the Bible, so that the page opened at random should supply the answer required, had this much of truth in it, that the Bible has an answer for every question of an inquiring soul. But this answer must be sought in intelligent, prayerful study, and not as a matter of blind chance, or in the presumptuous expectation of a miraculous answer. The answer may be obtained either from the example of some eminent saint under similar circumstances, as of Abraham giving up his right in order to avoid strife with Lot (Gen. xiii. 8, 9), Elisha refusing Naaman's gifts, Job blessing God in the extremity of his affliction, and the numerous examples in Luke vi. 3; Heb. xi.; James v. 17, &c.; or by impregnating the mind with the teaching of the word of God, such as Deut. vi. 5, or the Sermon on the Mount, or the precepts in Rom. xii., xiii.; Gal. v. 22, 23; Ephes. iv. 22, *sqq.*, and 1 Pet. throughout. And either way the answer will be sure if it is sought faithfully. 2. A Christian may inquire of the Lord *by seeking the counsel of a wise and honest friend*, who will give him impartial advice. The prophets were distinguished for their faithful boldness in speaking unwelcome truths as much as for their inspired knowledge. Nathan speaking to David, Isaiah counselling Hezekiah, Daniel reproving Nebuchadnezzar or Belshazzar, Jeremiah advising Zedekiah, are instances of such faithfulness. Let the Christian then who is in doubt or perplexity as to the course which he ought to take seek the counsel of a wise and faithful friend, whose mind will not be biased by passion or prejudice, and let him act according to it. 3. *God's guidance may be sought by simple prayer*. Just as Hezekiah in his great perplexity and distress spread Sennacherib's letter before the Lord, and betook himself to earnest prayer, so may a Christian man spread out before God all the particular circumstances of his case, and all the doubts and difficulties by which he is harassed, and in simple-minded earnestness ask God to direct and guide him aright. And the answer will doubtless come, either by the Holy Spirit suggesting to his mind the considerations which ought chiefly to influence him, or strengthening feeble convictions, and confirming uncertain opinions and hesitating reasonings, or clearing away the clouds which obscured his path, or in some providential interference barring, as it were, the wrong course, and throwing open the gates of the right one for him to pass through. The opportune arrival of Rebekah at the well while Abraham's servant was in the very act of prayer (Gen. xxiv. 15); the arrival of the messengers of Cornelius while Peter was in doubt what the vision which he had seen might mean (Acts x. 17); the dream which Gideon heard the Midianite tell to his fellow, just when he was hesitating whether he ought to attack the Midianite host, are examples, to which many more might be added, how providential circumstances come in to give to the servant of God the guidance which he asks. It is obvious to add that these three modes of inquiry may be combined.

II. The *second lesson* is THE ADVANTAGE IN ALL IMPORTANT UNDERTAKINGS OF CO-OPERATION AND THE MUTUAL ASSISTANCE OF FRIENDS. The answer from God to the

inquiry, Who shall go up first? had come. "Judah shall go up: behold, I have delivered the land into his hand." Yet none the less did Judah say to Simeon his brother, "Come up with me, . . . and I likewise will go with thee into thy lot." It is not enough then even to have the help of God: the laws under which humanity is placed by God require that man have also the help of man. "As iron sharpeneth iron, so a man's countenance his friend." Our Lord sent out the seventy "two and two before his face." "Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them," was the saying of the Holy Ghost. The strength of two is greater than the strength of one. The wisdom of two is better than the wisdom of one. In co-operation one can supply what the other lacks. One has courage, another has prudence. One has knowledge, another knows how to use it. One has wealth, the other has the wit to use wealth. One has wisdom, but is "slow of speech;" the other "can speak well," but is foolish in counsel (Exod. xxxii.). No man has all the qualities which go to make up perfect action, and therefore no man should think to do without the help of his fellow-man. It is a presumptuous state of mind which makes a man seem sufficient to himself, and an uncharitable state of mind which prompts him to withhold help from his fellow. A beautiful lesson may be learnt from the co-operation of the blind with the deaf and dumb in institutions where they are trained together. What the blind learn by the ear they communicate to the eye of the deaf, and what the deaf learn by the eye they communicate to the ear of the blind. And so it should be in everything. A man should seek help from his neighbour, and should be equally ready to give help to him in return. "Come up with me into my lot, . . . and I likewise will go with thee into thy lot," should be the law of human fellowship running through all the transactions of human life. But yet not so as to weaken individual responsibility, or to destroy just independence of character; but so as to give to each the full help towards the performance of duty which God has provided for him, and to nourish man's care for his neighbour by listening to his neighbour's calls for help.

III. The *third* lesson may be briefly stated. DIFFERENT PARTS ARE ASSIGNED TO DIFFERENT PERSONS: MORE SHOWY ONES TO SOME, MORE HUMBLE ONES TO OTHERS. But the humbler part may be as really useful and as acceptable to God as the more showy one. To some the lot is assigned of merely helping others to rise to their destined eminence, and then being forgotten. And yet they really have a share in all that is well done by those whom they helped to raise, and who could not have risen without their help. Thus Simeon helped Judah to take possession of his lot, and Judah ever after took the foremost place among the tribes of Israel; but Simeon almost disappears from view. In like manner Andrew first brought his brother Simon to Jesus; but it is Simon Peter to whom were given the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and who occupies the first place among the twelve. Barnabas took Saul and brought him to the apostles, and again went to seek him at Tarsus, and brought him to Antioch; but the place filled by St. Paul in the Church of God as far transcends that of Barnabas as the place of Judah among the tribes transcends that of Simeon. This should give encouragement to those whose work is humble and out of sight. Let the servant of God do "what he can." Let him not envy the talents, the brilliant gifts, the powers, the fame, the glory of others. But let him be content if by the grace of God he can in any way help forward the work of God's Church on earth, although his name be not mentioned till he receives his reward before the judgment-seat of Christ.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1, 2.—*Transfer of authority.* Periods when supreme power passes from rulers to their descendants are always of critical importance. It is then that the greatest constitutional modifications take place. Partly from the differences of disposition and view, partly from the force of new circumstances, partly from the failure or creation of peculiar official sanctions and dignities, the legislative or executive function seldom remains wholly unchanged in passing from one holder to another. In this case, as the dignity and authority of Moses did not entirely pass to Joshua, so the office the latter filled must have greatly altered with its occupancy by

the numerous body, "the sons of Israel," or elders and tribesmen. More frequent deliberation, the consultation of competing interests, &c., had to precede any national action against the common enemy. The great *Lawgiver* had passed away, the *Soldier-Dictator* had also been gathered to his fathers, and now it devolved upon a simply appointed but sacredly authoritative *constitutional assembly* to carry into effect the purposes of their predecessors. Compare with this the rise of parliamentary influence in Europe, and especially in England.

I. THE MODIFICATION OF GOVERNMENT. Sometimes this is sudden, sometimes gradual. Here it does not affect the essential principle of the theocracy. There is something very pathetic in the spectacle of an orphaned nation appealing to the "God of their fathers." It was not an extraordinary outburst of reverence and religious humility, but the beginning of a habitual and necessary practice. The voice of Jehovah through his authorised representatives was the supreme law for Israel. 1. *It behoves all nations and individuals to ask God for wisdom and direction, especially at such times of transition.* The altered conditions of life; the transfer of legislative authority; the attainment of mature years; a youth's leaving home; the death of parents, guardians, rulers, &c., are reasons for a closer walk with God, and a more attentive heed to his word. 2. *Responsibility is inevitably transferred with authority.* A sacred war is the legacy of the fathers of Israel to the children. If they are disposed to lag in its carrying forward, untoward events prick them on, and discomfort and disorder increase the necessity for action. "Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown." The peasant envies the king, the child the parent, only to be in turn regarded with a greater envy by those they assume to be fortunate and happy. Authority tempers and chastens power. The assumption of the latter without regard to its obligations is a profane and wicked thing, and must in the end defeat itself. Responsibility is the moral and religious side of authority; duty of right. In no case has a ruler or government lightly to regard inherited responsibilities. Freedom is not the result of violent changes, but "broadens slowly down from precedent to precedent." That one has had no part or choice in the making of an agreement or the inauguration of a policy is no reason by itself for repudiation. What is wrong must be put right, and false steps retraced; but the practicable policy of the present is generally a modification of the former and traditional one, rather than entire departure from it. The oneness of responsibility in past and present ought to be carefully observed, and acknowledged even where changes are introduced. None of us makes his own circumstances. Most of them are inherited. Our duties are often born before ourselves, awaiting us in the appointed time. 3. *The advantages and disadvantages of a plurality of rulers are here illustrated.* (1) Where there are several or many in power there is a *representation of popular views and interests*, (2) the advantage of *collective and deliberative wisdom*, and (3) *mutual stimulus and emulation*. On the other hand, (1) they are *liable to jealousies and envies*, (2) *it is difficult to preserve a good understanding*, (3) *they are more subject to popular panics*, and (4) *are unlikely to take a bold initiative*.

II. UNCHANGEABLENESS OF THE SUPREME AUTHORITY. Under all circumstances the ideal government for Israel must ever be the theocracy. Moses, Joshua, the elders, the judges, the kings—these are but the human representatives of the absolute and Divine; they are but the stewards of a heavenly mystery, holding authority from the Supreme, and liable at his bidding to restore it again. Paul (Rom. xiii. 1—5) summarises the general aspects of this principle:—"Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. . . . For he is the minister of God to thee for good. . . . Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake." 1. This must be recognised by human delegates. The elders immediately and publicly "asked Jehovah." The force of the original expression is that no time was lost. Only as he led them could they be preserved from error. 2. To make men subject to the Supreme must ever be the goal of their efforts. Their whole policy will be, therefore, in a wide sense evangelical, viz., to bring men to God, to deepen their reverence for truth, righteousness,

purity, and to encourage a personal attachment to Christ as the embodiment of these.—M.

Ver. 1.—*Spiritual initiatives.* The one stern fact facing every Israelite is God's command to uproot the Canaanite. There must be at least one land wholly consecrated to Jehovah and freed from idolatry. The warfare is an inheritance, even as the land is. There is a common obligation to fulfil this task; but it is not to be done severally, at haphazard. United action being difficult on account of the loss of the great captain, representative action is the next best. Now upon one tribe, and now upon another, will the honour devolve of carrying the war into the ranks of the enemy. It is a kind of conscription of the tribes, the honour of the burden being borne in turn by one for all. In this case no lot is cast. Jehovah is the disposer of the forces of his kingdom.

I. THE LEADERSHIP IS MADE KNOWN THROUGH PRAYER AND INQUIRY. As yet no tribe had premier rank amongst its fellows. God must decide who shall go up first. He is the fountain of honour, and he must be approached by the wonted avenues. Accordingly, the priest or the prophet is called upon to exercise his functions. There is something very beautiful and pathetic in this united asking of Jehovah by the tribes. Where God is acknowledged as the Supreme Arbiter, harmony is certain to prevail. It is well for Christians to submit all their anxieties to their Divine Father. So we find the early disciples praying after their Master's ascension. And the Church at Antioch observed a like rule ere it sent its missionaries forth to the region beyond. Spiritual work must ever be prefaced by prayer; and although God may not declare the leaders of it by a special utterance, tokens will be given which will enable them to be discovered.

II. IT IS RENDERED OBLIGATORY BY A "CALL." We are not informed as to the precise manner in which the will of God was made known. Probably the Urim and Thummim were consulted. Joshua is never mentioned as doing this; like Moses, he receives the word of God directly. The leaders of Israel receive the word of God from the priest, and the response is not oracular, but clear and definite. A twofold advantage pertained to this decision. It obtained for the chosen one the recognition of his brethren, and confirmed his own faith. An articulate supernatural "call" is not always required for undertaking God's work, but we have a right to demand of those who assume the lead in spiritual things that they shall have clear and unmistakable proof of a vocation. And it stands to reason that one who feels a "necessity laid upon him" to do certain spiritual work shall be more likely to succeed in it.

III. THE DIVINE CHOICE IS JUSTIFIED BY THE CHARACTER AND PAST CAREER OF ITS SUBJECT. This is not to say that these furnish a reason for it. With regard to all Divine work it may well be asked, "Who is sufficient for these things?" But frequently human insight and experience justify Divine measures, so far as they go. It was Judah who delivered Joseph from the pit. He confessed his sins (Gen. xxxviii. 26). Jacob intrusted Benjamin to his care, and blessed him in the words—"Thy brethren praise thee; the sceptre shall not depart from Judah." His tribe became the most numerous and warlike (Numb. ii.); and of the commissioners appointed to allot the land, the representative of Judah is first mentioned (Numb. xxxiv. 19). But above all, it was Judah and Ephraim alone who furnished the spies that gave a faithful account of the land—Caleb and Joshua. The former still lived, chief of the tribe of Judah. Ephraim, the tribe of Joshua, being already settled, Judah's turn comes next. We see therefore that although human merit cannot be said to determine Divine appointments, the latter will often be found to run in the same line.—M.

Ver. 3.—*Alliances in the holy war.* The lots of Judah and Simeon were closely united. The former's prerogative of leading off is therefore shared with the weaker tribe, which in all things is carefully considered by its "brother." It was impossible completely to separate the interests of these two; the understanding was honourable to both sides.

I. IN SPIRITUAL UNDERTAKINGS THE GREATER SHOULD EVER CONSIDER THE LESS. It is in this way that our Saviour's injunction, "Let him that would be chief among you be as him that serveth," is often best interpreted. The onus of brotherly

consideration and charitable construction is with the stronger because of the advantage they already possess. It is also the more to be admired in them because of the rarity of its exercise. On this occasion Judah lost nothing, and Simeon secured a powerful ally, and an opportunity of distinction. Besides this, the kindest sentiments were encouraged on either side.

II. BY COMMENCING IN THIS SPIRIT IT IS THE MORE LIKELY THAT MORAL ELEVATION, MAGNANIMITY, AND BROTHERLY AFFECTION WILL BE PRESERVED ALL THROUGH. The waiving of personal precedence is not only graceful, it has a tendency to perpetuate itself. Our future work takes its character from the first step.

III. IT IS AN EXAMPLE TO OUR BRETHREN, AND A WITNESS BEFORE THE WORLD TO THE UNITY OF GOD'S PEOPLE. Spiritual men above all others should not first ask, "What is our right?" but, "What is our obligation, and how can we best illustrate the spirit of the Master?" The tone was set to all the other tribes, and jealousy either at Judah or one another checked ere it appeared. True unity was the strength and safety of Israel. That the neighbouring nations were impressed with the spirit of brotherhood and unity in Israel there is abundant proof. They felt they were dealing not with a mere aggregate of numbers, but with a whole inspired by common sentiment and religious enthusiasm. It is this spirit which most perfectly realises the aim of Christ's kingdom, and his prayer "that they all may be one;" "that they may be made perfect in one."—M.

Ver. 7.—*Correspondence of crime and requital.* The crime of Adoni-bezek was against not any special national law, but humanity. It was one calculated to create and foster the most cruel disposition, the moral sense being rendered callous by habituation to a spectacle of abjectness and suffering dishonouring to our common nature. Frequent amongst the heathen nations of the East, it was all the more necessary that it should be punished in an emphatic and exemplary manner. "Thumbs were cut off to incapacitate the hand from using the bow; great toes to render the gait uncertain." The circumstance stands forth here as an ancient "instance" of an eternal law, which may be thus expressed:—

I. THERE IS A CLOSE CONNECTION BETWEEN EVERY SIN AND ITS PUNISHMENT. This may be taken as a conviction more universal in its influence than religion itself. Yet it is not wholly reducible to experience. It is as truly rooted in faith as any other axiom of the spiritual life. In order to reinforce it we have (1) what may be termed *pictorial illustrations* of it. The traditions and histories of the world are full of these. Neoptolemus murdered at the altar, and at the altar he was murdered ('Pausanias,' iv. 17, 3); Phaleris roasted men in a brazen bull, and in like manner was he himself punished ('Gesta Rom.,' xlviii.). Bajazet carried about by Tamerlane in an iron cage, as he intended to have done Tamerlane. Cardinal Beaton, upon whom Wishart's sufferings were avenged in a violent death, &c., &c. This affects the popular imagination more powerfully than any direct proof; and hence the crowd of real or fancied instances that have been recorded. It is in the light of this conception probably that Exod. xviii. 11 is to be interpreted. (2) *The principle reveals itself in the history of nations and individuals.* Ishmael is the grand type of this. The story of the mutineers of the Bounty is still fresh in memory. And how many family records would show the family likeness of sins and their Nemesis, and the natural connection and development of the one from the other! In Judas the betrayer it shines with tragic grandeur. (3) *The confessions of sinners themselves strengthen the belief.*

II. THE JUSTICE OF GOD IS FAITHFUL AND EXACT. "When the Olympian," says Homer, "does not speedily punish, he still does it later" ('Iliad,' iv. 160). "The Almighty may not punish this week or next, my Lord Cardinal," said Anne of Austria to Richelieu, "but at the last he punishes." In the incidents of human life we seem to see links of an almost invisible chain connecting sin with judgment, as cause with effect. And if in the few cases we know the punishment is so finely, even dramatically, adjusted, are we not justified in believing that beneath the surface there is even a finer and more inevitable equivalency observed? It is here too we have another evidence of the superior moral influence of the doctrine of providence as compared with fate. Both are inevitable, but the former rationally and rectorially so.

III. BUT BY AWAKING REFLECTION AND REPENTANCE OUR PUNISHMENT MAY BECOME OUR SALVATION. There is a gleam of something more than fatalism in Adoni-bezek's confession. It is just possible that it betrays an unfeigned repentance. The higher law of grace may step in to rescue us from the law of vengeance. Many a soul has drawn back before the hideous vision of "sin when it bringeth forth."—M.

Vers. 1, 2.—The death of the great. The circumstances which accompanied and followed the death of Joshua are suggestive of the common difficulties which arise on the death of great men, and the conduct of Israel is an example of the right spirit in which to face these difficulties.

I. THE MOST USEFUL MEN ARE OFTEN CALLED AWAY BEFORE THEIR WORK IS FINISHED. The measure of work which God requires of them may always be accomplished, for he sets no task for which he does not supply all needful talents and opportunities. But the work which a man aims at accomplishing, which he sees needing to be done, which men trust him to achieve for them, is commonly greater than his time and powers allow of perfect performance. 1. This fact should teach the most active workers (1) *diligence*, since at the best they can never overtake their work, and (2) *humility*, in the thought of the little that the ablest can accomplish compared with what he aims at. 2. This fact should lead all men (1) not to lean too much on any one *individual*, (2) to be ready to welcome *new* men, (3) to train *children* to take the places of their parents.

II. THE DEATH OF GREAT MEN SHOULD INSPIRE US WITH A DESIRE TO CONTINUE THEIR UNFINISHED WORK. 1. It is foolish to be content with *idle panegyrics*, as though we could live for ever on the glory of the past. Life must not be spent in a dreamy contemplation of the sunset, however brilliant this may be. While we gaze the radiance fades; night will soon fall. We must be up and preparing for shelter under the darkness, and for work in a new day. 2. It is weak to sink into mere regrets and despondency. We do not honour the dead by wasting our lives in barren grief. When the great and good are gone the future may look blank and hopeless; but God is still with us, and he will still provide for us. Therefore we should do as Israel did. Not satisfied with the glory of Joshua's victories, nor stunned by the blow of his death, the people look forward, seek for guidance for the future, and endeavour to continue his unfinished work. The richest legacy we can receive from the great is the unfinished task which drops from their dying hands. The noblest monument we can erect to their memory will be the completion of that task; the most honourable epitaph we can write for them will be the story of the good works for which their lives and examples have inspired their successors.

III. AS POSTS OF RESPONSIBILITY BECOME VACANT, IT IS WISE TO SEEK THE GUIDANCE OF GOD IN THE CHOICE OF NEW MEN TO OCCUPY THEM. After the death of Joshua Israel consulted "the Eternal." It is a blessing that the loss of our most trusted earthly friends should drive us to the refuge of the great heavenly Friend. In the present case new leaders do not now arise by selfish ambition, nor are they chosen by popular election. The selection of them is referred to God. Israel thus recognises its constitution as a theocracy. Every nation should consider itself under a supreme theocracy. Political leaders should be chosen by a Christian nation only after prayer for Divine guidance. Much more evident is it that the selection of men for service in spiritual things, as ministers, as missionaries, &c., should not be left to the mere inclination of the individual or the unaided human judgment of others, but determined after the most earnest prayer for Divine light (Acts i. 24). Note—such a method of election implies a willingness that the chosen leaders should be called to do God's will, not merely to humour the popular caprice.

IV. WHEN GREAT MEN ARE TAKEN AWAY IT IS OFTEN THE CASE THAT NO MEN OF EQUAL ABILITY ARE FOUND TO SUCCEED THEM. Joshua was not equal to Moses, but he was still well able to take the staff of leadership from his master's hand. But Joshua left no successor. Nothing but anarchy faced the nation "after the death of Joshua"—it seemed as though there could be no "after." There are advantages in the absence of great men. The multitude may become indolent, trusting too much to the work of the few. When these are removed men are thrown back on their own resources; thus the courage and energy of the whole people is put on trial. Yet

on the whole we must feel that it is better to have the great among us. The death of Joshua is the signal for the decadence of the nation from its ancient heroic glory. Therefore let us pray that God will continue the race of good and great men, and seek to educate and discover such among the young. Let us be thankful that our Joshua—Christ—will never be taken from his people (Matt. xxviii. 20).—A.

Ver. 3.—*Mutual help.* I. IN THE ABSENCE OF UNITY OF AUTHORITY WE SHOULD SEEK FOR UNION OF SYMPATHY. After the death of Joshua the loss of leadership endangers the national unity of Israel. In the text we see how two tribes, no longer united by a common government, draw together for mutual help. The union of free attraction is nobler than that of external compulsion. The highest unity of Christendom is to be found not in the Roman Catholic organisation of a central authority and uniformity of creed and worship, but in the spiritual conception of common sympathies and common aims.

II. BROTHERLY KINDNESS IS A PECULIARLY CHRISTIAN GRACE. Love of the brethren is a proof of regeneration (1 John iii. 14). The law of Christ as contrasted with the barren Levitical law of ordinances is characteristically summed up in the obligation to "bear one another's burdens" (Gal. vi. 2). 1. This implies *active help*. Simeon and Judah went to battle for an inheritance. Mere feelings of sympathy are wasted sentiments unless they lead to active and fruitful service. 2. This implies *sacrifice*. The Simeonites and men of Judah risked their lives for the benefit of one another. Cheap charity is worthless charity. Our brotherly kindness is of little value till it costs us something—involves pain, loss, sacrifice. Christ is the great example of this. It is our mission to follow Christ here if we would be his true disciples (Phil. ii. 4—8). 3. This implies *mutual help*. Judah helps Simeon; Simeon in turn helps Judah. Charity is often too one-sided. The poor and needy can often make more return than appears possible if invention is quickened by gratitude. A miserable penitent could wash the feet of Christ with her tears (Luke vii. 38).

III. THE WORK OF LIFE IS BEST DONE BY UNION AND CO-OPERATION OF WORKERS. Judah and Simeon conquer their two possessions by union. Both might have failed had they acted singly. "Union is strength." The advantage of mutual help is seen in trade, in manufactures, in education, in the advance of civilisation generally. The spirit of Cain is fatal to all progress (Gen. iv. 9). The same applies to Christian work. Therefore Christ founded the Church. Though Christianity is based on individualism, it works through social agencies. The society of Christians, the Christian family, find means of useful effort which private Christians could never attain, e. g. in the Sunday school, foreign and home missions, the work of Bible and tract societies. Simeon and Judah united to conquer their several lots successively. So it is sometimes wisest for us to unite and do together one work well at one time, rather than to spread our divided energies over a wide field of weak agencies. The river which runs out over a broad plain may be swallowed up in the sands of the desert, while that which flows in a narrow channel is strong and deep.—A.

Vers. 6, 7.—*Retribution.* I. THERE IS A LAW OF RETRIBUTION. 1. *The desire for retribution is instinctive.* It is one of the elementary ideas of justice. To those who have no vision of a higher law, the execution of this is not a cruel crime of vengeance, but a righteous exercise of justice. 2. *The fitness of retribution is not affected by the motive of those who accomplish it.* It is possible that the Israelites were ignorant of the old crimes of Adoni-bezek, and may have been guilty of wanton cruelty in treating him as they did. If so, his wickedness was no excuse for their barbarity. But then their harsh intentions did not affect the justice of the king's sufferings. God often uses the crime of one man as a means of punishing the crime of another. He does not originate or sanction the retributive crime, but he overrules it, and so turns the wrath of man to the praise of his righteous government. Thus Nebuchadnezzar was no better than an ambitious tyrant in his conquest of Jerusalem; yet he was the unconscious agent of a Divine decree of justice. 3. *Sin will surely bring retribution.* (1) No rank will secure us against this. The sufferer in this case was a king. (2) No time will wear out guilt. It is likely that Adoni-bezek had committed his crimes in bygone years, as he referred to them in a way which suggests that the memory of them was suddenly aroused by his own

experience. 4. *Retribution often bears a resemblance to the crimes it follows.* The *lex talionis* seems to be mysteriously embedded in the very constitution of nature. The intemperate slave of bodily pleasures brings on himself bodily disease; cruelty provokes cruelty; suspicion arouses distrust. As a man sows so will he reap (Gal. vi. 7, 8). 5. *One of the most fearful elements of future retribution will be found in an evil memory.* Men bury their old sins out of sight. They will be exhumed in all their corruption. The justice of the retribution will then increase the sting of it (Luke xvi. 25).

II. THE HIGHER CHRISTIAN LAW OF LOVE. Christianity does not abolish the terrible natural laws of retributive justice, but it reveals higher principles which can counteract the disastrous effects of those stern laws, and a more excellent way than that of zealously advocating the execution of them. 1. *The Christian is bound not to desire vengeance.* He is called to forgive his enemies (Matt. v. 38, 39). If retribution must fall, let us leave it to the supreme Judge (Rom. xii. 19). 2. *The highest purpose of punishment is seen to consist in the preservation and the restoration of righteousness*—not in the mere balancing of sin with pain. Punishment is not an end in itself. The vengeance which seeks satisfaction to outraged honour in the humiliation of its victim is as unworthy of the character of God as it is foreign to the principles of Christian duty. Punishment is a means to an end, and that end is not mere revenge, but the deterring of others from evil, and, where possible, the restoration of the fallen (Heb. xii. 5, 6, 11). 3. *In the gospel forgiveness is offered for all sin.* The law is not evaded; it is honoured in the sacrifice of Christ. Now he has borne the sin of the world he can also release the world from its fatal effects. Therefore, though the thunder-cloud of retribution may seem as dark as ever, if we only look high enough we shall see the rainbow of God's mercy above it promising peace and forgiveness to all who repent and trust in his grace (Acts xiii. 38, 39).—A.

EXPOSITION.

Ver. 8.—*Read Fought against Jerusalem, and took it, and smote it.* It is the continuation of the narrative of the exploits of Judah and Simeon in conquering their respective lots.

Ver. 9.—*The valley, i. e. the Shephelah,* or lowlands, between the mountains and the coast of the Mediterranean, occupied by the Philistines.

Ver. 10.—*Hebron.* See Numb. xiii. 22; Josh. xiv. 13—15; xv. 13—19. Hebron was the burial-place of Abraham and Sarah (Gen. xxiii. 2, &c.; xxv. 9), of Isaac and Rebekah, and of Jacob and Leah (Gen. xxxv. 27—29; xlix. 31; l. 13), and the mosque, within whose massive walls the tombs of Abraham and the other four above mentioned are still preserved with the utmost reverence, is the most remarkable object in the modern city, which is called *El-Khalil* (the friend), after Abraham, *the friend of God*. A very interesting account of the Prince of Wales's visit to the Mosque of Hebron in 1862 is given in Dean Stanley's 'Sermons in the East.' David reigned in Hebron seven years and six months before he transferred the seat of power to Jerusalem (see 2 Sam. ii. 1, &c.; v. 1—5).

Ver. 13.—*Caleb's younger brother.* See note on ch. iii. 9.

Ver. 14.—*She moved him, &c.* There is

some obscurity in this verse, which seems to tell us that Achsah, on her wedding-day, when she was going to her husband's house, persuaded him to ask of her father the field, viz. that in which the springs of water were, and which were not included in her original dower; and then goes on to tell us that Achsah herself made the request. The Septuagint reads, "Othniel urged her to ask the field of her father," and the Vulgate has, "Her husband told her to ask her father," and then it follows naturally, "and she lighted from off her ass," &c. But the Hebrew reading may be right, and it may be that when her husband, brave in storming a city, but timid in asking a favour, hung back, she, with the tenacious will of a woman, sprang off the ass herself, and successfully preferred her request. Dean Stanley identifies (though not with absolute certainty) the "field" thus obtained by Achsah with an unusually green valley amidst the dry, barren hills of the south country, lying south or west of Hebron, called Wady Nunkur, through which Caleb and Achsah must have ridden on their way from Hebron to Debir, or Kirjath-sepher. This valley breaks into a precipitous and still greener ravine, and both the upper and lower pastures are watered by a clear, bubbling rivulet, which rises in the upper

meadow, and flows to the bottom of the ravine below. The name of a village, *Dewir*, seems to represent the ancient *Debir*.

Ver. 16.—*The children of the Kenite, &c.* It appears from this verse that the invitation given by Moses to his "father-in-law," or rather "brother-in-law," Hobab, to accompany him and the Israelites to the land of promise, though at first rejected (Numb. x. 29, 30), was eventually accepted. Hobab and his tribe, a branch of the Midianites, called Kenites, from an unknown ancestor, *Kain*, at first settled in the city of palm trees, i. e. Jericho (Deut. xxxiv. 3); but it seems that when Judah started on his expedition with Simeon to conquer the south land, the Kenites went with him. A subsequent migration of a portion of this nomadic tribe is mentioned (ch. iv. 11). *Dwelt among the people*, i. e. the people of Judah. For *Arad* see Numb. xxi. 1.

Ver. 17.—*Judah went with Simeon.* In ver. 3 *Simeon went with Judah*, because the places which follow were all in Judah's lot; but now we read, *Judah went with Simeon*, because *Zephath* or *Hormah* was in Simeon's lot (Josh. xix. 4). For *Hormah*, identified by Robinson (ii. 181) with *Es-sufeh*, see Numb. xxi. 3. The Hebrew verb for "they utterly destroyed" is the root of the name *Hormah*, i. e. *utter destruction*.

Ver. 18.—*Gaza, &c.* Gaza, Askelon, and Ekron, were all cities of the Philistines. But though Judah took these cities, it seems he was not able permanently to expel the inhabitants.

Ver. 19.—*Chariots of iron.* The chariots of the Canaanites were very formidable to the Israelites, who had no means of coping with them. Thus we are told of Jabin, king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor, that he had 900 chariots of iron, and mightily oppressed the children of Israel. They were later an important part of King Solomon's army (1 Kings x. 26). See too Josh. xvii. 16.

Ver. 20.—*They gave Hebron, &c.* Caleb, the son of Jephunneh, the Kenazite, an Edomitish tribe, was one of the spies sent up to spy the land, and in doing so he came to Hebron, and there saw the giants, the sons of Anak (Numb. xiii. 22). When all the spies brought up an evil report of the land, and by doing so raised a rebellion against Moses and Aaron, Caleb the Kenazite, alone with Joshua, stood firm, and, as a reward of his faithfulness, received the promise that he and his seed should possess the land on which his feet had trodden. Accordingly Hebron became the inheritance of Caleb the Kenazite (see Numb. xiii. xiv.; Deut. i. 36; Josh. xiv. 6—15; xv. 13, 14).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 8—20.—*Faith.* The principal incident in this section is the conquest of Hebron by Caleb (see note, ver. 20), and in it we have a most striking illustration (1) of the nature of faith, (2) of the triumph of faith, (3) of the faithfulness of God's promises, and (4) of the extension of God's covenant to men of every nation and kindred.

I. THE NATURE OF FAITH. When the Israelites were in Kadesh Barnea, near the borders of Canaan, in the second year of the exodus, it was determined on their own suggestion, with the full approval of Moses, to send spies to search out the land, and to bring back word what road they ought to take, and into what cities they would come. Thus far there had been only a due exercise of human wisdom and caution. But when the spies returned after forty days they brought back a mixed report. On the one hand they reported that it was indeed a goodly land. Its fertile soil, its genial climate, its beauty and its richness, were attested by its abundant produce. As they held up the heavy bunch of the grapes of Eschol, a burden for two men to carry upon a staff, as they showed them the luscious figs and the juicy pomegranates, who could doubt that it was a land worth possessing? It was rich too in its pastures and in its cattle, and its wild-flowers were as good as the thyme of Hymettus for the bees that swarmed amongst them. It was a land flowing with milk and honey. But here their good report stopped. This good land was guarded, they said, by a mighty people. It was a gigantic race that possessed it, and they dwelt in fenced cities with Cyclopean walls rising up to heaven. How could the children of Israel hope to wrest their land from them? It would be a vain enterprise, and could only end in their own discomfiture and death. Those men of great stature would crush them like grasshoppers under their feet. At these unbelieving words the hearts of the whole congregation melted within them, and anger against Moses filled every breast. The suggestion ran from mouth to mouth to choose a captain and return to Egypt. The promises of God were all forgotten. The mighty wonders at the Red Sea, at

Sinai, in the wilderness, were lost sight of, and their hearts sunk through unbelief. Then Caleb's faith shone out, and spoke out before the people. "Let us go up at once and possess the land, for we are well able to overcome it." "Fear not the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the Lord is with us: fear them not." "If the Lord delight in us, then he will bring us into this land and give it us." That was faith, laying hold of God's promises and God's almighty power, and making no account of apparent difficulties, or of human weakness. Just such was Abraham's faith, who "staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God, and fully persuaded that what he had promised he was able also to perform" (Rom. iv. 20, 21). Such has been the faith of saints at all times, piercing through the mists and clouds of the present, and seeing the bright sun of the future; despising the visible because, like Elisha in Dothan, it sees the invisible (2 Kings vi. 13—17); calculating truly, because it takes into account the power and faithfulness of God which are left out of the calculations of the unbelieving.

II. THE TRIUMPH OF FAITH. And we see here the triumph of faith. The whole congregation of the unbelieving, of those who in their hearts turned back to Egypt, and dared not face the sons of Anak, had all perished in the wilderness. They died and were buried, and never saw the land of promise. But Caleb was alive, and in the full vigour of his strength he marched against the stronghold of the Anakim, and took it, and slew the sons of Anak in spite of their great stature, and took possession of their city in spite of its lofty walls, and it became his possession for ever. That was the triumph of faith, that faith which disappoints not, and maketh not ashamed.

III. THE FAITHFUL PROMISES. We have here too an eminent illustration of the faithfulness of God's promises. Caleb's triumphant possession of Hebron chimes in in exact harmony with all the records of God's *performances* as compared with his *promises*. "He hath holpen his servant Israel as he promised to our forefathers" (Luke i. 54). "He hath remembered his mercy and truth toward the house of Israel" (Ps. xcvi. 3). "He hath visited and redeemed his people, as he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, . . . to perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant; to perform the oath which he sware to our forefather Abraham" (Luke i. 68—73, Pr. B. Version). "He is faithful that promised" (Heb. x. 23). "Blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord" (Luke i. 45). "There failed not aught of any good thing which the Lord had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass" (Josh. xxi. 45). A thorough appreciation of faithfulness to his Word as one of the prominent attributes of God is the inevitable result of a full knowledge of the Scriptures, as it is most conducive to the stability of the Christian character. "For ever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven; thy faithfulness is unto all generations" (Ps. cxix. 89, 90).

IV. A GLIMPSE OF THE MYSTERY. But we must also notice the illustration here given of God's purpose to extend his covenant to men of all nations. Caleb was not an Israelite by birth. He was a Kenezite, *i. e.* a descendant of Kenaz, whose name is a clear proof of Edomite origin (Gen. xxxvi. 15, 42). And accordingly we are told, "Unto Caleb the son of Jephunneh he gave a part among the children of Judah" (Josh. xv. 13); and again, "Hebron became the inheritance of Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenezite, because that he wholly followed the Lord God of Israel" (Josh. xiv. 14), language clearly pointing to Caleb's foreign origin. We have here then the breadth of God's grace and love breaking out in the narrowness of the Jewish dispensation; we have a glimpse of the mystery, which St. Paul spoke of so rapturously, that it was God's good pleasure in the dispensation of the fulness of times to gather together into one all things in Christ, and that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel (Ephes. i. 9, 10; iii. 6). Caleb, possessing his inheritance in the midst of Judah because he wholly followed the Lord the God of Israel, was the forerunner of that great multitude of all nations and kindreds and peoples and tongues who shall stand before the Lamb clothed in white robes and palms in their hands, and shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 11—15.—*The public spirit of Caleb.* He offered his daughter to the soldier who should be successful in destroying the inhabitants of Debir. It was of supreme importance that this stronghold should be taken, if the rest of the district was to be peaceably held. But some reward was required in order to stimulate the heroism of his followers to face the hazard and danger of the enterprise. We have here then—

I. AN IDENTIFICATION OF HIMSELF WITH THE INTERESTS OF HIS TRIBE. Caleb was an Edomite, and might have enjoyed his own lot without such special effort or sacrifice. He is evidently deeply interested in the welfare and honour of his adopted tribe. This might be called a signal illustration of public spirit. And yet it is probable that Caleb himself was quite unconscious that there was anything singular in his action. As the greatest blessings to a nation arise from the public spirit of its citizens, so the greatest curses are frequently entailed by the want of it. As in warfare every soldier, however insignificant, is an influence that tells upon the success or failure of the campaign, so in a government, with representative institutions whose action binds the nation and measures its progress, it is requisite that every citizen should actively interest himself in electing and supporting the legislative authority. The free play of an intelligent, generous, and enthusiastic public criticism will tend to the health of the whole body politic, and *vice versa*. Even more cogent is the need for public spirit in the church. Its honour and dishonour are ours, its success or failure. And it represents interests of the most tremendous importance. "England expects every man to do his duty" is a sentence of historic importance. Although not called upon to preach, or even to pray in public, the private member of the church ought to regard the affairs of Christ's kingdom with enthusiasm, and be prepared to make great sacrifices for its advancement:

II. HIS PROOF OF THIS IN BESTOWING ONE OF HIS MOST PRECIOUS POSSESSIONS. We do not know much about Achsah, but probably she was very beautiful. Her forethought and carefulness are described in the fourteenth and fifteenth verses. She was his only daughter, born to him in later life (1 Chron. ii. 49). That she was dear to her father we may take for granted. How much a daughter may be to a father history has frequently and strikingly shown. The grief of Jephthah for the consequences of his rash vow is recorded in this very book. Apart from the personal attractions of Achsah, the influence which might be obtained by intermarriage with the family of Caleb is not to be ignored.

III. IT WAS A SACRIFICE WHICH HAD IN IT THE SECURITY FOR ITS OWN REWARD. An offer like this was an appeal to the chivalry of the tribe. It suggested vividly that on account of which the bravery of the warrior is so necessary. The soldier who stormed such a fortress was sure to possess the noble and manly qualities and the religious zeal calculated to make a good husband. So in political and spiritual matters, generous offers and challenges appeal to what is noblest in the nature of men, and secure a loftier and more heroic response.—M.

Vers. 14, 15.—*Compensations.* Of the wisdom and carefulness of Achsah we have here abundant proof. They were nobly and honourably exercised. She is the daughter of a rich man, and becomes the bride of a brave soldier who had evidently little but his sword and his reputation to boast of. She is jealous lest he should be rewarded with a mere titular distinction. He has been nobly oblivious of material rewards, *she* shall be proportionably watchful over his interests. She therefore urges her husband as he passes in triumph to Hebron to ask for the field through which they march. The thoughts of the hero are not to be directed into any such sordid channel. But she, taking advantage of the occasion as she lights from off her ass, asks her father in symbolic language to compensate her for the poverty to which he had consigned her. "Thou hast given me a south land (*i. e.* married me to a poor younger son); give me also springs of water." To this reasonable request Caleb makes generous response. "She slides from her ass, suddenly, as if she fell, so that her father asks, 'What is the matter with thee?' Her answer has a double sense, 'Thou gavest me away into a dry land; give me also springs'" (Cassel).

I. A BLESSING WITH A DRAWBACK. Of the bravery of Othniel there could be no question; of his poverty there could be as little. It might be honourable for her to be his wife, but she would have to suffer many sacrifices in leaving the wealthy home of her father, and her husband would have an additional burden to sustain. Are not the dispensations of providence, even when we judge them on the whole to be best for us, frequently as mysteriously qualified and limited? No man would probably care to exchange his life for another's, but "there's a crook in every lot." Material blessings generally contain within them elements of discipline, and sometimes even of punishment. But they are alike the gift of a loving father, and are to be accepted in the spirit of trust and affection.

II. COMPENSATIONS. Is the gift of Achsah's father open to grave drawbacks? It is not therefore unalterable. Something may be done to lessen its inconveniences, if not entirely to remove them. Her father is reasonable, and she at once makes appeal to his sense of what is fit and proper. Her request is granted. So with ourselves. Our heavenly Father who apportioned our lot is surely as reasonable and affectionate as any earthly one. It is for us to exercise the same wisdom as Achsah, and request that God will give us such alleviations to our portion in life, or reveal to us those that already exist. Sometimes there are compensations latent in the very circumstances of which we complain: springs of water to moisten a sun-parched soil. In any case God is able to bestow upon us exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think.—M.

Vers. 19.—*Divine help versus material obstacles.* The statement of this verse is perplexing; hardly softened if we render "there was no driving out," &c. On the one hand, apparently, infinite power is on the side of Judah; on the other, there are sharply-defined limits to his success, and singular reasons for his failure. (Describe inhabitants of mountain and valley.) One would suppose that if God had really been with Judah, the chariots of iron would be neither here nor there in the question. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" But the difficulty arises from looking at the problem wholly from the Divine side. The same difficulty faces us to-day. "But this temptation was so great!" "But was not the Lord with you?" *Infinite power may be on our side, but we may be debarred by failure of faith from making full use of it.*

I. UNREALISED SPIRITUAL POWER. Many of the brutes have power greater than man, but they cannot bring it to bear. Is man never similarly unfortunate? In what sense can the power of God in the saint be unrealised? It is not power *wasted* or *lying idle*, but simply like a cheque unused. Our spiritual nature is not developed enough.

II. INSUFFICIENT REASONS FOR FAILURE OR SUCCESS. These arise from the same cause as the preceding. The tool in hands of tyro and master. The true panoply of a Church is spiritual; and its material advantages may sometimes be as Goliath's armour to David; and so may the spiritual advantages, if we do not realise them, keep ourselves in continual communion with them, and test their virtue by continual exercises of faith.

III. WAYS IN WHICH MAN LIMITS GOD. By failure of faith. By neglect of the means of grace. By personal unholiness. "God's arm is not shortened," &c., "but ye are straitened in your own selves."—M.

Vers. 19—21.—*A title to be made good.* Each of these—Judah, Caleb (of the same tribe), and Benjamin—had received their portion at the hands of the Lord; but they had to conquer it. Judah partially succeeded, Caleb wholly succeeded, and Benjamin had a grievous drawback to his success. *This is suggestive of the blessedness to be attained by Christians.*

I. THE PROMISE IS COMPLETE AND ABSOLUTE TO EVERY CHRISTIAN. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even your faith." The least Christian is assured of this splendid triumph.

II. ITS REALISATION WILL DEPEND UPON THE MEASURE OF HIS FAITH, &c. The estate with a mortgage. Judah had already "fought against Jerusalem" and subdued it, at least the southern portion abutting upon, or included in, their boundary. But they

did not subdue the citadel, which was in Benjamin's lot. The latter, on the other hand, are too careless, unwartlike, or indisposed to make good their possession.—M.

Ver 19.—*The presence of God in the battle of life.* The most remarkable circumstance connected with the wars of ancient Israel is the religious faith which guided and inspired the people for battle. In this respect the conduct of those wars is typical of the Christian method of spiritual warfare.

I. GOD IS WITH HIS PEOPLE IN THE BATTLE OF LIFE. God is not only the Refuge in distress and the Father of peaceful mercies; he is the Source of strength and of courage, and the Inspirer of the masculine virtues of the Church militant—he is with us in *battle*. God does not grant his aid from a distance, through messengers, &c.; he is *present* in the active exercise of his power. 1. *When God calls people to any task, he will follow and help them in it.* God had chosen Judah for the work of conquering the Canaanites. He also followed Judah to battle. Divine election was followed by Divine power. God never expects us to undertake any work in which he will not aid us. If he calls us to any difficult task, he will go first, and prepare the way for us, and then will accompany us in it, as our Guide and Protector. 2. *They who are united in the service of God have peculiar reason for expecting the presence of God.* Judah and Simeon were united, and God aided them in their common task. God does not desert the solitary: e. g. Hagar (Gen. xvi. 13), Jacob (Gen. xxviii. 16), Elijah (1 Kings xix. 9). But we have a special right to expect his presence when we co-operate in brotherly sympathy. Christ is present where two or three are met together in his name. The Holy Ghost came on the day of Pentecost, when the whole Church was assembled together (Acts ii. 1).

II. THE PRESENCE OF GOD IS THE CHIEF SOURCE OF SUCCESS IN THE BATTLE OF LIFE. God was with Judah, *therefore* he obtained possession of the mountains. If God is with his people in their time of toil and difficulty, his presence is a security of active aid. He is with us not merely to approve, but to help. The victory comes from him. It is not all who have faith and spiritual insight to discern this truth. God does not come with a visible host and with "chariots of iron;" but his presence and aid are felt in the providential control of events; in the inspiration of strength and courage; in the enlightenment of Divine wisdom. The best human securities for success will not justify us in neglecting the help of God. Simeon and Judah were united, and were the stronger for their union; yet it was not the human strength thus obtained, but God's presence, which brought victory. There is a danger lest we should trust too much to imposing human arrangements, large societies, elaborate organisations, &c. The most splendid Christian army will be miserably defeated if it ventures to enter the field without the leadership of the "Captain of salvation."

III. THE PRESENCE OF GOD WILL NOT ALONE SECURE PERFECT AND IMMEDIATE SUCCESS. Though God was with Judah, still Judah could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley. 1. *God's presence and aid do not dispense with human effort.* It is Judah, not God, who fails. We may fail on our side of the work while God is not wanting on his. 2. *God's presence does not make us entirely independent of earthly circumstances.* God did not annihilate the chariots of iron. We must not expect God to work such violent miracles as shall liberate us from all the inconveniences of life. 3. *Human weakness may still linger about us after we have been blessed with the aid of God's presence.* The Israelites were too weak to overcome the inhabitants of the valley. Possibly they feared to face the chariots of iron. The measure of help we have from God is not limited in itself, but it is limited by our faith. If we had perfect faith we should have perfect success. But when we look away from God to the iron chariots of our foes, or, like Peter, from Christ to the threatening waves, we may fail from fear and human weakness, and God's almighty power will not then save us from defeat.—A.

EXPOSITION.

Ver. 21.—This verse is identical with Josh. xv. 63, except that there we read "the children of Judah" instead of "the children of Benjamin," as in this verse. The boundary line between Judah and Jerusalem passed through JEBUS or JEBUSI, as Jerusalem was anciently called (see Josh. xv. 8; xviii. 28; Judges xix. 10, 11; 1 Chron. xi. 4, 5). Jebus was not finally held by the Israelites till the time of David (see ch. xix. 10, note.)

Ver. 22.—The house of Joseph, *i. e.* Ephraim, but probably here spoken of as "the house of Joseph" because in the original document, from which both this chapter and Josh. xv. 63, and xvi. xvii. are taken, the mention of "the lot of the children of Joseph" occurs, embracing both Ephraim and Manasseh. See Josh. xvi. 1 and xv. 23, with which the twenty-first and twenty-second verses of this chapter are manifestly identical.

Ver. 23.—Bethel, now Beitin. The name (house of God) had been given by Jacob (Gen. xxviii. 19), but obviously would not be likely to be adopted by the Canaanitish inhabitants, by whom it was called Luz. As soon, however, as the Ephraimites conquered it, they reimposed the name, in memory of their father Jacob. The Saxon charters exhibit an analogous change in such transitions of name, as that from *Bedericksworth* to *Bury St. Edmunds*, which took place after the transfer of St. Edmund's body to the church there, the old name continuing for a time along with the new one, but at last disappearing.

Ver. 24.—We will show thee mercy. Compare the saving of Rahab alive, with all her house, at the taking of Jericho

(Josh. vi. 23). This history is not preserved in the parallel place in Josh. xvi.

Ver. 28.—Put the Canaanites to tribute, or made them tributaries, as in vers. 30, 33, *i. e.* imposed forced labour upon them, as the Gibeonites were made hewers of wood and drawers of water (Josh. ix. 21, 27; see 1 Kings ix. 21).

Ver. 32.—The Asherites dwelt among the Canaanites. In verses 29 and 30 it was said that the Canaanites dwelt among the Israelites; but here we read that the Asherites, and in ver. 33 that Naphtali, *dwelt among the Canaanites*, which seems to imply that the Canaanites were the more numerous people of the two, yet the Israelites were able to keep them in subjection.

Ver. 36.—The going up to Akrabbim. See Josh. xv. 3, *Maaleh-akrabbim*. In Numb. xxxiv. 4 "the ascent of Akrabbim." The whole name, put into English, is "the ascent, or going up, of Scorpions," a mountain pass so called from the abundance of scorpions found in the whole region. The exact locality is uncertain, but it is thought to be the pass *El-Safeh*, immediately to the south of the Dead Sea. The neighbourhood to Mount Hor and Petra is indicated by its connection here with "the rock," in Hebrew *has-selah*, which is the distinctive name of the rocks or cliffs on which Petra is built, and the name of *Petra* (the rock) itself. Speaking roughly, a line drawn westward from El-Safeh to the Mediterranean Sea, near the "river of Egypt," formed the southern boundary of Judah, and of the Amorites whom they displaced. The battle with the Amorites (Deut. i. 44), in which the Israelites were discomfited and pursued, is thought to have been at El-Safeh.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 21—36.—*Weak faith producing weak action.* This section, contrasted with the preceding, gives us an instructive picture of a weak faith—not of absolute unbelief forfeiting the whole promise of God, but of a weak faith—coming short of the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ. Caleb's faith, we have seen, was strong, and so his success was full. The faith of the tribes here enumerated was weak, and so their success was only partial. In the career of those who are of weak or little faith we may notice the following features which usually belong to them:—

I. THE WANT OF A HIGH AIM. These tribes did not rise to the full purpose of God to give them the land for their possession. They were content with a partial possession. So many Christians do not aim at perfect obedience to the law of God, or a perfect conformity to the mind of Christ, but are content with a conventional standard of Christian morality, very far below the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. They do not aim high enough in knowledge, or in character, or in works, or in godliness, or in the victory over sin, or in self-control, or in heavenly-mindedness.

II. THE OVER-ESTIMATE OF DIFFICULTIES. These tribes thought the iron chariots

invincible, shrunk from encountering them in the valleys, and slunk away into the hills and fastnesses out of their way. So to those of little faith the difficulties in the way of a thoroughly godly life seem insuperable. The fashions and customs of the world, the adverse opinions of men, the possible losses in trade or worldly advantage, or in useful friendships, the sacrifice of inclinations or interests, cannot be got over. Their hearts quail before difficulties and obstacles, and they are ever of a fearful and doubtful mind.

III. THE DISPOSITION TO COMPROMISE. These tribes could not or would not drive the Canaanites out, but they would make them tributaries. That was something done, if not all that ought to be done. So the weak in faith compromise in respect to their Christian duties. They do not yield a bold, whole-hearted obedience at any cost, but they will go half-way, and stop. They will curb the flesh, but not crucify it; they will check, but not destroy, the body of sin; they will follow Christ's directions up to a certain point, and then, like the young ruler, go away sorrowful. And this want of thoroughness is as fatal to the peace and comfort of a Christian's walk with God as was the compromise of the Israelites to their enjoyment of the promised land. In their case the enemies whom they failed to destroy were constant thorns in their sides—rising against them whenever they were weak, always ready to join their enemies, taking advantage of every opportunity to harass and distress them. And so in the case of these Christians of little faith: the sins which they spare, the affections with which they compromise, the habits which they will not utterly break off, and the unfinished victories at which they stop short are continually marring their peace, and even threatening their hold on the kingdom of God. And the result is seen in the general condition of the Church of God: one of compromise instead of mastery, of hollow truce instead of decisive victory.

IV. AN UNDERRATING OF THE POWER AND GRACE OF GOD. This is the cause of all the evil, and is of the very essence of a weak faith. When God's power and goodness and grace are underrated, all goes wrong. Low aims, fear of difficulties, base compromises are sure to prevail. But with the due sense of all-sufficient grace all goes well. "My grace is sufficient for thee," saith the Lord to his believing servant. "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" is the servant's answer. Let us make a due estimate of the glorious grace of God in Christ Jesus our Lord; so shall we be "strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might."

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 22—26.—*An unwilling helper of the cause of God.* Into the motives that actuated him we need not pry. Chief of all was the great one of self-preservation. Was it honourable? Was it right for the soldiers of God to make use of such an instrument? There may have been other considerations that had weight with him. It might have been virtuous to resist the offer: was it necessarily vicious to yield to it?

I. THERE ARE MANY WHO HELP THE TRUTH FROM LOWER MOTIVES WHO MIGHT DO SO FROM HIGHER. Expediency; public benefits of religion; ties of relationship; reputation. How great the blessing to Christ's cause if the *same things* were done from higher motives!

II. THEY ARE BLESSED, BUT NOT AS THEY MIGHT OTHERWISE HAVE BEEN. A better service would have secured a higher reward.

III. THEY CANNOT BE RELIED UPON, AND THEREFORE MAY NOT BECOME PART OF GOD'S PEOPLE. The conquering host could not trust the traitor whose help had won them the city. He must go forth with his reproach. Many churches contain the elements of weakness and ruin because they have failed to exercise a wise censorship over those admitted to their communion. The true Church is composed of those who serve God from the purest motives.—M.

Ver. 28.—*Human wisdom versus Divine.* No option was left to the Israelites as to the mode in which they were to deal with the Canaanites. Even if they were unable to subdue the Canaanites because of their own weakness, it would not be without fault; for had they not to sustain and direct them? But the sin of Israel was

the greater that, when they were able to obey God's direction, they set it aside in favour of a policy of their own. This was direct disobedience, however it might be disguised by the name of prudence or expediency. In the end they had to rue their own folly.

I. PEOPLE IN PROSPEROUS CIRCUMSTANCES ARE FREQUENTLY TEMPTED TO FOLLOW A WORLDLY INSTEAD OF A HEAVENLY LINE OF CONDUCT, AND TO QUALIFY THE DICTATES OF OBVIOUS DUTY BY CONSIDERATIONS THAT ARE PURELY SELFISH AND PRESUMPTUOUS IN THEIR NATURE.

II. WHEN MEN THUS SHIRK OBVIOUS DUTY, THEY DO IT FROM A TWOFOLD MISCONCEPTION—(1) of their own power and wisdom, and (2) of the true character of that with which they tamper.

III. IN THE END THEIR FOLLY WILL MANIFEST ITSELF IN DISASTER AND RUIN.—M.

Vers. 34, 35.—*The failure of duty of one on an occasion of inconvenience to another.* Joseph, strong enough to have destroyed the Amorites, made them tributaries. The same people a little further away were thereby enabled to afflict and annoy a companion tribe. "The Amorites forced the children of Dan into the mountain," &c. The cause of Dan ought to have been the cause of Joseph. The latter was therefore guilty of intense selfishness.

I. IT IS A SIN FOR CHRISTIANS TO REAP ADVANTAGE AT THE EXPENSE OF LOSS OR INCONVENIENCE TO THEIR BRETHREN.

II. GOD OFTEN MAKES THE UNWORTHINESS OR FAULT OF ONE OF HIS CHILDREN A DISCIPLINE TO ANOTHER.

III. BUT THIS DOES NOT FREE THE LATTER FROM THE RESPONSIBILITY OF DOING HIS BEST. Dan might be annoyed, and justly, at the indirect help given to his oppressors, but all the same he ought to have invoked the aid of Jehovah and gone forth to do battle against them. He might have delivered himself from the inconvenience to which he was subject. And so with all the indirectly produced ills of life; a heroic faith is certain to overcome them, or render them comparatively innoxious.—M.

EXPOSITION

CHAPTER II.

It is often extremely difficult to make out the *sequence* of a Hebrew narrative, the narrator going back and travelling over the same ground in *respect of time* which he had already traversed, in order to introduce some circumstances which had been omitted. (see ch. vii. 25, note, and viii. 4, note). This appears to be the case with this section. The mention of Gilgal in ver. 1 seems to point distinctly to the early time of the entrance into Canaan under Joshua, because it was quite in the beginning of the Israelite occupation that the camp was at Gilgal, and it was there that the angel of the Lord spake to Joshua (Josh. v. 9, 10, 13—15). We find the camp still at Gilgal in Josh. x. 9, 43, and it was from the camp at Gilgal that Caleb went forth to his conquest (ch. xiv. 6), and also that Ephraim and Manasseh went forth to take their inheritance (chs. xvi., xvii.); but in ch. xviii. 1, 9, 10 we find Shiloh, in the hill country

JUDGES.

of Ephraim, the place of the national gathering of "the host," and the tabernacle pitched there; and the same in ch. xix. 51; xxi. 2; xxii. 9, 12. Josephus tells us that Joshua moved his camp from Gilgal to Shiloh in the hill country at the close of the fifth year ('J. A.' v. i. 19). This ascent of the angel from Gilgal in the plains of Jericho to Bochim in the hill country would seem, therefore, to have been about the beginning of the sixth year of the occupation of Canaan, and the rebuke in it to apply chiefly to Ephraim and Manasseh, though in part to Judah also. The place of this section chronologically would be between ver. 29 and ver. 30 of ch. i. It should be noticed also that this section is very closely connected with Josh. xxiv.; for, first, Judges ii. 6 is identical with Josh. xxiv. 28, and the verses that follow Judges ii. 6 are also identical with those that follow Josh. xxiv. 28. It is likely, therefore, that what immediately precedes Judges ii. 6 should be very closely connected with what immedi-

C

ately precedes Josh. xxiv. 28, and should relate to the same time. Now the discourse of Joshua (xxiv. 1—15) is only an expansion of the brief address of the angel in Judges ii. 1—3. The expostulation about the strange gods in Josh. xxiv. 14, 23, is in exact accordance with the complaint of the angel in Judges ii. 2; and the warm protestation of the people, "We will serve the Lord," in Josh. xxiv. 18, 21, 24, is in full accordance with what is said Judges ii. 4: "The people lifted up their voice, and wept." Again, the mention in Josh. xxiv. 1 of the people presenting themselves "before God," and of "the sanctuary of the Lord" (ver. 26), agrees with what is said Judges ii. 5: "They sacrificed there unto the Lord." And lastly, the somewhat mysterious words in Josh. xxiv. 27, "This stone . . . hath heard all the words of the Lord which he hath spoken to us," would have an easy solution if the message of the angel (Judges ii. 1—3) had been spoken before it. The inference is that Joshua's address in Josh. xxiv. was delivered immediately after the transaction recorded in this section.

Ver. 1.—*An angel of the Lord.* Rather, *the angel of the Lord*, i. e. the angel of his presence, whose message consequently is delivered as if the Lord himself were speaking (see Gen. xvi. 7, 9, 11, &c.). A good example of the difference between a message delivered by a prophet and one delivered by the angel of the Lord may be seen by comparing ch. vi. 8 with ch. vi. 11—16. *Bochim*, i. e. weepers (vers. 4, 5). The site is unknown, but it was probably near Shiloh. The phrase "came up" denotes that it was in the hill country.

Ver. 3.—*I said*, i. e. I now declare to you my resolve. It was this that made the people weep. *Thorns in your sides.* This is not a translation of the Hebrew text, which only has "for sides," but a partial adaptation of Josh. xxiii. 13, where the phrase is "scourges in your sides and thorns in your eyes." Either the words for "scourges in" have fallen out of the text, or the word here rendered "sides" should be rendered, as some think, "enemies." **A snare.** See ch. viii. 27, note.

Ver. 5.—*They sacrificed.* A clear intimation that they were near Shiloh, where the tabernacle was.

Ver. 6.—*And when Joshua*, &c. The same words as Josh. xxii. 6, marking the identity of time.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—6.—*The expostulation.* We have here an extraordinary messenger, the angel of the Lord, but the message is one which in its spirit might be addressed to men at any time, and at any place. For it speaks of God's flowing mercy arrested by man's stubbornness. "I made you to go up out of Egypt—I have brought you into the promised land. I have faithfully kept my covenant, but you have altogether failed to do your part. Ye have not obeyed my voice." The one requirement of God that, when they took possession of the land, they should make no league with its inhabitants, but should throw down their abominable altars, they had neglected to fulfil. They had thought of their own interest and convenience, and not of the honour of God. They had taken God's earthly gifts, but had rejected his word. They had shown themselves to be self-seekers, greedy, carnal, and forgetful of him from whom they had all. It was the old story of self slipping into the place of God—self as the supposed giver, and self as the person for whose glory the gift was to be used. "My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth," and therefore I will use it to my own ends. "Is not this great Babylon that I have built for the house of the kingdom, by the might of *my power*, and for the honour of *my majesty*?" This is the spirit that is constantly slipping in, in a greater or less degree, even in the Church of God, and frustrating the purposes of his unbounded grace. For it is just as in the case of Israel. When they used the gift of Canaan not for God's purposes but for their own, which were quite contrary to God's—for God's purpose was the extirpation of idolatry; their purpose was the enjoyment of vineyards which they had not planted, and wells which they had not digged—they at once closed up the fountain of God's grace. "I will not drive them out from before you; they shall be as thorns in your side, and their gods shall be a snare unto you." And their future history was the history of the fulfilment of this threat. So it was in the history of the Church. The grace of God bestowed in such rich abundance upon the early Church at Pentecost and afterwards, that those who named the name of Christ

might be patterns to an evil world of love and purity and unselfish service, was soon stayed and checked by strife and discord, by worldly ambitions, by compromises with sin, and by fellowship with the corruptions of heathenism. So too it is with individual Christians. We check God's grace by not using it to the full; we hinder his mercy by not appropriating it, and not valuing it; we stop the flow of his good-will to us by setting up the objects of our own carnal desires and pursuing them, while we neglect the things which make for the glory of God. And just as the entire conquest of the Canaanites was not stopped by any deficiency of power in Almighty God, nor by any failure in love or faithfulness on his part, but simply by the sin of Israel, so now we may be quite sure that there is an infinite fulness of grace in Christ Jesus for all the Church's needs, and all the spiritual wants of each individual disciple, if only the hindrances of man's selfish disobedience are taken away, and an open channel is kept for God's free mercy to flow unimpeded in its gracious course. But, be it ever remembered, the disobedience to God's word, whatever it be, must be taken away. It is not enough to lift up the voice and weep over the consequences of sin past; it is not enough to sacrifice unto the Lord in hopes of averting his threatened punishments; there must be an entire return to the path of obedience, to walk with a whole heart in the way of God's commandments, and to obey his voice. For that is the end for which God bestows his grace "Elect unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." Let the Church, let the individual disciple, throw themselves unreservedly into this path of obedience, and God will fulfil in them all the good pleasure of his goodness, and their peace shall flow like a river.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—5.—*Bochim*. Who this "angel of the Lord" was we do not, probably were not meant to, know. He might have been Phinehas, the same who, according to Rabbinical interpreters, was the mouth-piece of Jehovah after the death of Joshua (ver. 1). But the probabilities are decidedly against such a supposition. It is "an angel," or messenger. At any rate the personality of the messenger (surely no celestial visitant, else why the journey and apparently public discourse?) is kept in the background. He is nothing, a mere "voice," but a voice giving utterance to Israel's consciousness of offending, and addressing and rousing it. The mere circumstance that he came from Gilgal, the first spot touched by Israel in Canaan, gave significance to his message. *Bochim* was probably at Shiloh, the appointed meeting-place of the tribes.

I. A PLACE OF SOLEMN RECOLLECTION AND RE-STATEMENT. Shiloh, the place of Israel's worship and sacrifice, is also the place of Israel's repentance. A name, *Bochim*, is given to it. "They named the place from their tears." So the house of God becomes the monument and memorial of our deepest religious experiences. No new revelation is here made. The simple facts of the Divine deliverance of the people, their perfidy and faithlessness, are recited; in contrast with which God's steadfastness is mentioned. The foundation article of the covenant is rehearsed, and the question asked, "Why have ye done this?" And then the connection of their punishment with their sin is set forth.

II. A PLACE OF INQUIRY, REMONSTRANCE, AND SORROWFUL APPEAL. The tone of this address is sympathetic and yet severe. The question, "Why have ye done this?" suggests to the people how foolish and profitless their conduct has been. How fitting would such a question be to many sinners of to-day. We too have broken plain precepts and sinned against the light of truth. What reason has there been in the conduct of God, in the nature of the duties neglected, or in the advantages we supposed we should secure? An appeal to conscience like this is of infinitely more value than a speculative disquisition. He is a true angel who bears such a message.

III. A PLACE OF REPENTANCE. Israel is invited to change its mind. God is solicitous for its repentance. He has sent "an angel" to produce this result. The tears that flow so freely are precious in his sight, and may avail, if followed up, to recover his favour and to reinstate them in their lost possessions. How great a privilege was this; not that it was a place of tears only, but that it might become a place of repentance, a turning-point in Israel's history. This Esau found not, though he

sought it carefully with tears. Let it therefore be seized as a blissful augury that God wills not the death of a sinner, but that all men may turn to him and live. Such experiences are not to be artificially produced. A faithful recalling of God's real dealings with us in the past ought to make tears flow from the most hardened of sinners. But let the next step be taken, and beyond the tears, even beyond the ostentatious sacrifice, let reformation commence at once with his help and blessing. Then shall we have reason to recall our tears with gratitude when we discover that our repentance is not to be repented of.—M.

Vers. 1—5.—*The preaching of repentance.* I. THE MISSION. 1. A *special messenger* is sent to preach repentance. There are men whose peculiar gifts and position mark them out as called to this difficult work, *e. g.* Elijah, John the Baptist, Savonarola, John Knox. 2. This man was *sent by God*. It needs a Divine call and inspiration to speak rightly to men of their sins as well as to preach the gospel of peace. He who is thus called must not shrink from fear or false kindness to men. 3. The preacher is simply commissioned to convey a *message from God*. The voice is a man's, but the words are God's. The true preacher must always regard himself as the messenger of God, not at liberty to indulge in his own speculations, or to claim authority for his own judgment, but simply to declare, and interpret, and apply, the truth which God has entrusted to him (1 Tim. i. 11). 4. The preacher *carries the message* to the people. He does not wait for an audience to assemble about him; he does not wait for a spontaneous repentance. He journeys from Gilgal to Bochim. They who most need the preacher are least likely to come to hear him. Therefore he must go after them. The visitor, the city missionary, &c., have here a special work to reach those who will never enter the church, but all preachers of repentance must learn to seek their hearers.

II. THE MESSAGE. 1. This commences with a review of *God's goodness and faithfulness*. If we have been sinful he has still been merciful to us. He has kept his side of the great covenant, so that if we miss the good fruits of it this must be because we fail on our side. It is well to call attention to these facts before pointing out the sin of men, (1) that this may be felt more deeply in contrast with the goodness of God, (2) that the purpose of God in calling to repentance may be recognised as gracious, not vindictive (Rom. ii. 4). 2. The message contains a *definite charge of sin*. This must be definite to be effective. All admit they are imperfect. The difficult and delicate task of rebuking consists in making men see their special guilt in regard to particular sins. (1) In the present case the sin consists in guilty tolerance of evil. Religion should be aggressive. The Church is called to separate herself from the world (1 Cor. v. 11). (2) The root of the sin is disobedience. All sin is disobedience to the written law, or the law in our hearts; it is the setting up of our will against God's will. 3. The message closes with a *warning of punishment*. This punishment was to be a direct consequence of their tolerance of evil. Punishment is a natural fruit of sin.

III. THE RESULTS. We see the preaching of repentance producing the most varied results. Some turn a deaf ear; some hear and resent it; some hear and approve, but apply the message to others; some hear and admit the truth of the rebuke, but have no feeling of the sting of it; some feel sorrow under the rebuke, but do not rise to the active repentance of *will*. In the present instance the people heard meekly, humbly, and penitently, and the word bore fruit in genuine repentance and reformation. 1. They *wept*. Sorrow for past sin is natural and helpful towards future amendment, though if left to itself it will be a barren sentiment. 2. They *sacrificed*. Thus they acknowledged guilt, sought forgiveness in the mercy of God, and consecrated themselves to his service. It is not repentance, but faith in Christ, the sacrifice for sin, following this, that secures to us God's forgiving mercy. 3. They *served the Lord*. This is the final outcome, and certain proof of genuine repentance. The depth of our repentance must be measured not by the number of tears we shed, but by the thoroughness of our amendment of life, and the faithfulness of our subsequent service of God (Luke iii. 11).—A.

EXPOSITION.

Ver. 7.—**And the people served, &c.** This verse is the epitome of the religious history of Israel from the time of the expostulation of the angel till the dying off of all those who had been elders in the time of Joshua. It probably includes some forty or fifty years from the entrance into Canaan, viz., about thirty years of Joshua's lifetime, and ten, fifteen, or twenty years after Joshua's death. The record of the people's continuance in the service of the Lord connects itself with the promise made by them in Josh. xxiv. 21, 24. **All the great works, &c.** Scarcely those prior to the crossing of the Jordan, though some might remember some of the events in the wilderness when they were mere children (Numb. xiv. 31), but the victories in Canaan.

Vers. 7—9.—These three verses are identical with Josh. xxiv. 29—31, except that the order is slightly varied.

Ver. 8.—**An hundred and ten years old.** Caleb was eighty-five years old, he tells us (Josh. xiv. 10), when he went to take possession of Hebron, forty-five years after the spies had searched Canaan from Kadesh-Barnea, and consequently some time in the seventh year of the entrance into Canaan. Joshua was probably within a year or two his contemporary.

Ver. 9.—**Timnath-heres.** Probably, though not certainly, the modern *Tibneh*, six miles from Jifna. It is called in Josh. xix. 50 and xxiv. 30 *Timnath-serah*, the letters of which are identical, but the order is inverted. *Timnath-heres* is probably the right form. It means "The portion of the Sun." We have *Mount Heres* in ch. i. 35, near Ajalon. *Ir-shemesh* (city of the sun) and *Beth-shemesh* (house of the sun) are other instances of places called from the sun. Some have supposed some connection between the name *Timnath-heres*, as Joshua's inheritance, and the miracle of the sun standing still upon

Gibeon at the word of Joshua (Josh. x. 12, 13). The neighbourhood of Timnath-heres to Ajalon (ch. i. 35) may give some countenance to this. The hill *Gaash* is only elsewhere mentioned as the birthplace of Hiddai or Hurai (2 Sam. xxiii. 30; 1 Chron. xi. 32), but the exact site is unknown.

Ver. 10.—**Which knew not the Lord, &c.** The memory of God's great works gradually faded away, and with this memory their influence upon the hearts of the people. The seductions of idolatry and the influence of heathen example were ever fresh and powerful. Had the people obeyed the voice of the Lord, the idolatry and the idolaters would have been out of the way. We may notice by the way the value to the Church of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper in keeping alive a perpetual memory of Christ's precious death until his coming again.

Ver. 12.—**They forsook the Lord, &c.** Here again there is a manifest allusion to Josh. xxiv. 16, 17.

Ver. 13.—**Baal and Ashtaroth.** *Ashtaroth* is the plural of *Ashtoreth*, the goddess of the Zidonians (1 Kings xi. 5, 33), just as *Baalim* (ver. 11) is the plural of Baal. The many images of Baal and Ashtoreth are, in the opinion of some, indicated by the plural; but others think that different modifications or impersonations of the god and goddess are indicated. Thus we read of *Baal-berith*, the god who presides over covenants; *Baal-zebul*, or *Zebub*, the god who presides over flies, who could either send or remove a plague of flies, and so on. "Baal (lord or master) was the supreme male divinity of the Phœnician and Canaanitish nations, as Ashtoreth (perhaps the star, the planet Venus) was their supreme female divinity. Baal and Ashtoreth are frequently coupled together. Many Phœnician names—Hannibal, Asdrubal, Adherbal, Belus, &c.—are derived from Baal."

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 7—13.—**Influence.** Joshua holds a distinguished place among the worthies of the Old Testament. As the faithful minister of Moses, as the servant of God, as the bold and believing spy, as the successor of Moses, as the captain of the hosts of Israel, as the conqueror of Canaan, as the type of the Lord Jesus, whose name he bore, he stands in at least the second rank of the great men of the sacred history. But in nothing is he more conspicuously great than in the INFLUENCE which he exercised upon others by his authority and example. We learn in this section that his weight and influence with the Israelitish nation was such that for a period of not much less than half a century it sufficed to keep the fickle people steadfast in their allegiance to the God of their fathers. By his own influence while he lived, and after his death by the influence of those whom he had trained during his lifetime, the contagion of

idolatry was checked, and the service of God maintained. It is not all great men who have this faculty of influencing others, but it is a most invaluable one.

I. THE QUALITIES WHICH SEEM NECESSARY TO GIVE IT ARE—(1) Force of character. There must be a firm and steady will, moving always in the orbit of duty, and propelled by inflexible principle, in those who are to influence others. (2) There must be also a quick discernment, a sound judgment which makes few or no mistakes, and a high range of morals and of intellect. (3) There must be a lofty courage to cope with difficulties without flinching, to inspire confidence, and to break down obstacles. (4) There must be unselfishness, and a noble, generous purpose soaring high above petty worldly objects, so as to provoke no rivalries and to excite no suspicions. (5) There must be the qualities which attach men—kindness, geniality of disposition, fairness, considerateness, love; and the qualities which excite admiration, and make it a pleasure and an honour to *follow* him that has them. (6) There must be an absence of vanity and self-conceit and love of praise, and a genuine simplicity of aim. (7) And above all, to make a man's influence strong and lasting, there must be in him the true fear and love of God, and the conscious endeavour to promote his glory in everything. Joshua seems to have possessed all these in a high degree, and his influence was in proportion. That he not only possessed but actively exerted this influence for good we see by his address to the people recorded in Josh. xxiv. And this perhaps should make us add, (8) as one more quality necessary in those who are to influence others largely, that moral courage which makes a man speak out boldly what he knows to be true for the express purpose of persuading and guiding others.

II. While, however, *influence* on the scale in which Joshua exercised it can be possessed by few, EVERY CHRISTIAN MAN OR WOMAN, whatever may be their station, CAN AND OUGHT TO BE EXERCISING A HEALTHY INFLUENCE IN THEIR OWN IMMEDIATE CIRCLE. The light of a genuine Christian life is a light which will make itself seen wherever it shines. In the home, be it palace or cottage, in the village street, in the town court, in the shop, in the factory, in the camp, in the ship, in the social circle, be it humble or be it exalted, be it rude or be it refined, be it unlettered or be it literary and scientific, the influence of a pure, humble, vigorous, devout Christian life must be felt. It must be a power wherever it is. The object of these remarks is to stimulate the reader to desire and to endeavour to exercise such an influence for good, and to supply a motive for checking any action, or course of action, which may weaken or impede such influence. An outbreak of temper, a single grasping or unscrupulous action, a single step in the path of selfishness, or uncharitable disregard of another's feelings or interests, may undo the effect of many good words and good works. A conscientious desire to influence others for their good and for God's glory will supply a strong motive for watchful care to give offence in nothing.

III. But this section supplies an important caution to those who are influenced. When Joshua and the elders were dead, the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord. THEY HAD NO *selbständigkeit*, NO INDEPENDENT STRENGTH, NO POWER TO STAND FIRM BY THEMSELVES. Their religion, their good conduct, depended upon another. He was the buttress that supported them; when the buttress was taken away they fell. Hence the caution not to trust in mere influence, but to look well to the foundations of our own faith. The influence of another man is no substitute for a converted heart, and for soundness in faith and love. St. Paul well knew the difference in some of his followers when he was present and when he was absent, and so would have their faith stand not in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. It behoves us all to take care of our real principles of action, to examine ourselves, to prove our own selves, whether we be in the faith, whether Christ be really formed in us, whether we are seeking only to please those who have influence over us, or to please God. Else that may happen to us which happened to the Israelites, our upright Christian walk will last as long as we have the support of the good and strong, and no longer. We shall serve the Lord for a while only, and end by serving Baalim and Ashtaroth. The sober Christian life will be exchanged for folly and dissipation, and the pure creed degenerate into superstition or unbelief.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 6—13.—*The force of personal testimony and influence.* These verses are an explanation of how the evils came about which Israel deplored at Bochim. They explain, too, the fact that idolatry had not yet made much way amongst the people. "They described the whole period in which the people were submissive to the word of God, although removed from under the direct guidance of Joshua. The people were faithful when left to themselves by Joshua, faithful after his death, faithful still in the days of the elders who outlived Joshua. That whole generation which had seen the mighty deeds which attended the conquest of Canaan stood firm. Our passage says, 'for they had *seen*,' whereas Josh. xxiv. 31 says, 'they had *known*.' 'To see' is more definite than 'to know.' The facts of history may be known as the acts of God without being witnessed and experienced. But this generation had stood in the midst of events; the movements of the conflict and its results were still present in their memories" (Cassel). A new generation arises which "knows not Jehovah, nor yet the works which he had done." The "elders"—Joshua and his contemporaries—did this service; not only were they themselves faithful to God, but they kept alive the recollection of his mighty deeds and the national piety of Israel.

I. TESTIMONY IS OF GREATEST EFFECT WHEN IT IS THAT OF THOSE WHO HAVE SEEN AND KNOWN. St. John makes this claim for himself and his fellow apostles (1 John i. 1), and even St. Paul declares that Christ was manifested to him also as unto one that was born out of due time. It is a law of our nature upon which this proceeds. The nearer we are to our own personal experience, other things being equal, the more are we impressed with the reality of events. It was as if the people themselves had seen the miracles of the exodus when they had still amongst them Joshua and the elders. This advantage may be realised by Christians to-day. The gospel facts must become a real experience in the heart of him who would seek to influence others. By faith it may be so. We too may see our Saviour face to face. The preacher's vivid realisation of the supernatural and the Divine often exercises an overwhelming effect upon the hearer; whereas, on the other hand, to speak of our Saviour and his works as if we were telling an idle tale is to expose ourselves to certain failure. A Church that could *relive* the heroisms of the cross would be irresistible.

II. IT RECEIVES FRESH CONFIRMATION IN THE BEHAVIOUR OF THE WITNESSES. They were holy men. They lived in the constant remembrance of those awe-inspiring scenes. This was the most effective way of conveying to others their own impression and enthusiasm. Witness like this is within reach of all, and does not require scholarship to make it possible.

III. DEATH AND TIME ARE THE GREAT IMPAIRERS OF THIS INFLUENCE. With each good man who dies a witness disappears. The further we get in years from the actual scenes of miraculous power, the less effect are they calculated to produce. But the word of God liveth and endureth for ever, and God repeats spiritually the signs and mighty acts of his salvation in the experience of every true believer.—M.

Vers. 11—13.—*Israel's apostasy.* The repeated apostasy of Israel and the consequences of it furnish the ever-recurring theme of the darker pages of the Book of Judges. It may be well, therefore, to look at the subject generally, apart from special instances.

I. THE NATURE OF THE APOSTASY. 1. It consisted in *forsaking God*. All sin begins here, because while we live near to him it is impossible for us to love and follow evil. If we *cannot* serve God and mammon, so long as we are faithful to God we shall be safe from the idolatry of worldliness. The guilt of forsaking God is great because it involves (1) disobedience to our Father, (2) ingratitude to our Benefactor, (3) the fall from devotion to the Highest to lower pursuits. 2. This apostasy consisted in *the worship of other gods*. The shrine of the heart cannot long be empty. Man is a religious being, and he will have some religion; if not the highest and purest, then some lower form of worship. We must have a master, a God. 3. There was nothing *inventive* in the apostasy of Israel. The people only

worshipped the old deities of the native population. They who give up Christianity for supposed novel forms of religion generally find themselves landed in some old-world superstition. 4. The guilt of the apostasy was aggravated by the *character* of the worship into which the people fell. This was (1) false—the worship of supposed gods which possessed no Divine power; (2) materialistic—the worship of idols in place of the unseen spiritual God; and (3) immoral—the worship of impure deities with impure rites.

II. THE CAUSES OF THE APOSTASY. 1. *Defective education.* So long as Joshua and his contemporary elders lived the people remained faithful. Apostasy arose in a new “generation which knew not the Lord, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel.” But if the former generation had trained its children aright they would not have been thus ignorant. The Church should feel the supreme importance of the religious education of the young. Her continued existence depends on this. Children do not inherit their father’s religion by natural succession. They must be trained in it. 2. *Circumstances of ease.* While the people were surrounded with the perils of the wilderness they displayed a moral heroism which melted beneath the sun of peaceful prosperity. Worldly comfort brings a great inducement to religious negligence. 3. *Tolerance of evil.* The earlier generation had failed to extirpate the idolatry of Canaan, and now this becomes a snare to the later generation. Indifference and indolence in regard to the wickedness which is around us is certain to open the door of temptation to our children, if not to ourselves. 4. *The worldly attractions of the lower life.* The service of God involves high spiritual efforts, purity of life, self-sacrifice, and difficult tasks (Josh. xxiv. 19). The service of the world is more agreeable to the pleasures of sense and selfishness. Regarded from the low ground of sense and with the short sight of worldly wisdom, it is easier to worship Baal than to worship the Eternal.—A.

EXPOSITION.

Vers. 14, 15.—*The anger of the Lord, &c.* These verses contain an awful view of the wrath of God excited by wilful sin, and are a practical illustration of Exod. xx. 5: “*I am a jealous God.*” Compare Ps. lxxix. 5, which shows how closely allied the notions of *anger* and *jealousy* are in Hebrew. **He sold them.** A forcible expression, implying the handing over of the people into the hands of their enemies, as if God had no more any property in them or concern about them; as if he said, “Ye are not my people, and I am not your God;” as if he said to the heathen, “Take them, and do as you will with them; they are yours, not mine” (see Levit. xxvi. and Deut. xxviii.). **As the Lord had sworn, &c.,** showing that God fulfilled his threatenings as well as his promises.

Ver. 16.—*Raised up judges.* Hence the name of this book, which recites the names and exploits of those whom God raised up to deliver them out of the hand of their enemies. The title *Judges* (Hebrew, *shophe-*

tim) is, as is well known, identical with the Carthaginian *suffetes*. Mark the riches of God’s mercy.

Ver. 22.—*To walk therein.* The Hebrew has *in them*. Probably for *way* we should read *ways*, as Deut. viii. 6; x. 12, &c. This verse does not seem to be part of what the Lord said, but to be the comment of the writer. The A. V.—*that through them I may prove*—inserts an *I* which is not in the original. Ver. 22 depends upon ver. 23. The literal rendering is, *For the sake of proving Israel, &c., . . . the Lord left those nations.* The writer, after rehearsing the Lord’s reason for not completing the extirpation of the nations after the death of Joshua, adds the further information why they had not been delivered into Joshua’s hand in his lifetime (cf. ch. iii. 1, 4). In Exod. xxiii. 29, 30; Deut. vii. 22, an additional reason is given for the gradual extirpation of the Canaanites—“*lest the beasts of the field increase upon thee.*”

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 14—23.—*The goodness and severity of God.* To know God as he is relatively to man—not as the absolute, which is impossible to be known, but such as he is relatively to man—is the highest of all knowledge which man can attain, and the most important for him to possess. Accordingly, one main purpose of revelation is

to give us such knowledge. And this is given in two ways. One is by descriptions of God's character, as, *e.g.*, that in Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7: "The Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children," &c. The other is by the authentic record of God's acts, specially in the gift of his only begotten Son to be the Saviour of the world, and in the Saviour's work as related in the Gospels, and also generally in his providential dealings with his people Israel, as set forth in the Old Testament. Of the latter method the Book of Judges, of which this section is an epitome, is a striking and instructive specimen. In it we have represented to us in vivid colours two characteristic features of the mind of God.

I. GOD'S HATRED OF SIN. With the usual anthropomorphism of Holy Scripture, we are told that when the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, they "provoked the Lord to anger." "The anger of the Lord was hot against them," it is twice repeated, and "his hand was against them for evil." Here, then, we see God's hatred of sin. And if God is infinitely good and holy, and if he knows the full misery that sin has brought into his creation, with what other sentiment can he regard sin but with that of hatred and indignation? Sin excites a holy anger in his mind, and his hand must be stretched out to punish and to check. If we reflect calmly, we must see that both of these are inevitable. God must look upon sin with displeasure, and he must act upon that displeasure. Evil must excite displeasure in one that is perfectly good; and in the moral Governor of the universe such displeasure cannot be quiescent and impotent, it must be active and effective. Reason teaches us so, and revelation sanctions, enlarges, and enforces the lesson.

II. GOD'S EXCEEDING AND TENDER MERCY. To use the same anthropomorphism as before, we see God ever relenting, ever yearning over the miseries of his people, ever repenting of the evil that he had brought upon them, when he heard their groanings, ever forgetting their provocations and offences, and stepping forward to deliver them. It is impossible to have mercy, forgiveness, benevolence, and love, depicted in more vivid colours. Anything more remote from the idea of a vindictive, hard, unforgetting nature it is impossible to conceive. And when we go on to inquire what are the conditions in man which, so to speak, draw out these not opposite, but different sides of the Divine character, we find that it is against persistent sin that the wrath of God burns, and upon which his heavy hand falls to smite; and that it is to the contrite and penitent who forsake their sins that his quick and willing mercy is extended. And then a little further reflection seems to show that just as in nature different forces are found ultimately to resolve themselves into one common force, so these two attributes of God, hatred of sin, and mercy, may really be expressed by one term—goodness, or love. Goodness or love relatively to persistent sin is righteous punishment; relatively to penitent sorrow it is mercy and forgiveness. And the reason of this is plain. Sin involves the misery of all who are subject to it, and of all God's creation, if it is suffered to continue and grow in it. It must therefore be the part of a good and loving God to extirpate sin, and that doubtless is the purpose of punishment, which is only another way of saying that punishment is remedial: remedial, if possible, to the being punished, that is, if it brings him to repentance; but anyhow remedial to creation, which in the continued punishment of the impenitent sees the evil of sin, and avoids it. The further doctrine of the ATONEMENT does not arise here, but it may just be observed how entirely it agrees with what we see here of God's character, since in it, as made by the death of the only begotten Son upon the cross, the two attributes of hatred of sin, and ineffable mercy, stand out with marvellous force and brightness. We conclude then that while mercy is goodness acting towards those who are not beyond the reach of goodness, severity is goodness acting with a view as far as possible to the happiness of the whole creation. And we see in the atonement a provision of infinite wisdom, by which the risk of injury to the many by mercy to the few is removed and done away with, and by which the severity and the mercy infinitely enhance and magnify each other. *Sin when it is finished bringeth forth death.* Other important lessons of the DEADLY FRUIT OF SIN, and of the INVETERATE PERVERSENESS OF MAN, recurring

to sin again and again, in spite of bitter experience, like a moth flying into the candle, and of the BARRIERS which man's stubborn disobedience sets up against the coming in of all the good things which God's love had prepared for him, flow spontaneously from the narrative in this section. So also does the lesson of the use of trouble as THE TRIAL OF FAITH (1 Pet. i. 7) and the test of obedience. In fact it opens a large and comprehensive chapter on the providential government of the Church and of the world.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 14—18.—*Mercy in the midst of judgment.* As the sin of Israel continues and multiplies, the anger of the Lord waxes hot. As the misery of his people deepens, his compassions fail not. There is no contradiction in this. The mercy of God is not a weakness, it is the minister and honourer of his law. The judges, who represented the mercy of God, by whom they were raised up in faithless times, were also witnesses of his righteousness, and living embodiments of his kingdom amongst men.

I. THE MERCY OF GOD DOES NOT CONSIST IN ALTERING THE LAWS OF HIS KINGDOM, BUT IN LEADING MEN TO CONFORM MORE PERFECTLY TO THEM. The covenant is still felt as a living power even when it is ignored. The evils foretold come to pass, and in ever-increasing force. But God pursues a plan of restoration. This plan is never one of destruction or reversal. Not one jot or tittle of the law has to pass in order that the gospel may have effect. God seeks to change the hearts of his erring children, and by the punitive operation of the laws of his kingdom to make them loyal subjects. The law that curses will also, when obeyed, be found to bless. The judges were a continuous witness to righteousness and protest against sin, and by the prestige of their mighty acts and the constant influence of their lives they led men back again to God and goodness. They were the embodiments of his mercy.

II. THE VICTORIES OF SIN ARE NEVER CONSIDERED BY HIM AS IRREVERSIBLE. It was said in praise of English soldiers that they did not know when they were beaten. How much truer is this of God and his people! The most appalling apostasy has not daunted our Heavenly Father, or driven him utterly away from his world. "Where sin abounded, there did grace much more abound." Some of the best of men and most comforting of doctrines were born in ages of spiritual darkness. He has never left himself without a witness. The course of revelation is never stopped. The succession of prophets, apostles, and martyrs is never interrupted. The servants of God in Old Testament times might be driven away or destroyed, but they, being dead, yet speak, and in the fulness of time he sends his Son; he, too, may be crucified, but nevertheless the Father will send the Comforter in his name. And so in the individual life this law will be found to operate. The darkest conscience has not been without its light.

III. ON THE WHOLE THE SPIRITUAL GAINS OVER THE CARNAL IN THE PROGRESS OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD AMONGST MEN. One judge passes away and another rises. The apostasies which they have to correct may become darker and more terrible; but greater deeds are forthcoming. The testimony is more and more emphatic. The principles of God's kingdom are illustrated and honoured, and Israel gradually emancipated from its ignorance and inexperience.—M.

Vers. 21, 22.—*Tested by temptation.* The pagan nations of Canaan were a constant source of temptation to idolatry and immorality. If they were left in the land, the fidelity of Israel would be tried by the way in which this temptation was met.

I. TEMPTATION IS NOT IMMEDIATELY SENT BY GOD. Israel had been commanded to expel the Canaanites; it was owing to the indolence and weakness of the invaders that their work was not completed. Having failed on their side, they now find that God will no longer secure them victory over their enemies. The temptation which thus resulted from the presence of the heathen in their midst grew out of their own conduct. God never tempts us (James i. 13). Temptation often arises out of negligence, indolence, needless pleasure, wilful presumption. It is vain to pray, "Lead us not into temptation," while we are creating temptations for ourselves.

II. TEMPTATION MUST OFTEN BE REGARDED IN THE LIGHT OF A PUNISHMENT. 1. It frequently comes as the *consequence* of former sin. The memory of sin, the contracted habit of sin, the associations of sin, and the weakness resulting from sin are all sources of new temptation. 2. Temptation is one of the most *painful* consequences of sin. If we have any love for goodness, one of the saddest results of our sin must be the consciousness of new temptations to which it renders us liable. For a good man to suffer temptation is to suffer pain. 3. We must therefore conclude that all the temptations we meet with are *not unavoidable and necessary*. We bring them on ourselves; we might have escaped them; they are dangerous calamities which we must deplore. We need not wish to be tried. If temptation is often a punishment, it is better to rest humbly ignorant of our own weakness than to court trial which will reveal the extent of it.

III. TEMPTATION IS USED BY GOD AS A TEST OF FIDELITY. The people of Israel would be proved by the temptation arising out of the presence of immoral idolaters in the midst of them. 1. Fidelity consists (1) in *care and firmness*,—"to keep the way of the Lord,"—and (2) in *diligence and progressive activity*—"to walk therein." 2. This fidelity is tested by the *attractions of evil ways*. We cannot be said to keep the way simply because we are found in it. But when the way is contested, or a more pleasing path opens out near to it, the strength of our fidelity will be put to the test. Some men need the test of temptation more than others. If they have already shown weakness, the punishment which comes in the form of a temptation may be a useful means of self-revelation. This need of proof, however, is a humiliation. It is better to be so clearly true as neither to invoke the punishment of temptation nor require the test it affords.—A.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER III.

Ver. 1.—*Now these are the nations, &c.* We are now told in detail what was stated in general in ch. ii. 22, 23, after the common method of Hebrew narrative. To prove Israel. This word to *prove* is used here in a somewhat different sense from that which it bears in ver. 4 and in ch. ii. 22. In those passages it is used of their moral probation, of proving or testing their faith and obedience; but here it is rather in the sense of "to exercise," or "to accustom them," to train them to war. A considerable period of rest had followed Joshua's conquest, during which the younger Israelites had no experience of war; but if they were to keep their hold of Canaan, it was needful that the warlike spirit should be kept up in their breasts.

Ver. 3.—*The five lords, &c.* The title *seven*, here rendered "lord," is one exclusively applied to the lords of the five Philistine cities enumerated in Josh. xiii. 3; 1 Sam. vi. 17, 18, viz., Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron. It occurs repeatedly in ch. xvi.; 1 Sam. v., vi., xxix., &c. The word means an *axe-tree*. The entering in of Hamath. There are two theories in regard to Hamath. Some, as Professor Rawlinson in the 'Dictionary of the Bible,' identify it with *Hamah*, a large and important city on the Orontes in Upper Syria, and consider that the kingdom of Hamath,

which was overthrown by the king of Assyria (2 Kings xviii. 34; xix. 13), and of which Hamath was the capital, was for the most part an independent Hamitic or Canaanite kingdom (Gen. x. 18), but occasionally, as in the days of Solomon and Jeroboam (1 Kings viii. 65; 2 Kings xiv. 28; 2 Chron. viii. 4), subject to Israel. Others, however, justly considering the great improbability of the Israelite dominion having ever extended so far north as the valley of the Orontes, and observing how it is spoken of as an integral part of Israel (1 Kings viii. 65), look for Hamath much further south, in the neighbourhood of Beth-rehob (see ch. xviii. 28, note). As regards the phrase "the entering in of Hamath," the identical Hebrew words occur seven times, viz., Numb. xiii. 21; xxxiv. 8; Josh. xiii. 5; in this passage; 1 Kings viii. 65; 2 Kings xiv. 25; 2 Chron. vii. 8, and are variously rendered in the A.V.: "as men come to Hamath;" "unto the entrance of Hamath;" "the entering into Hamath;" "the entering in of Hamath" (three times); and "the entering of Hamath." The exact meaning of the phrase seems to be "the approach to Hamath," some particular spot in the valley from whence the direct road to Hamath begins; very much like the railway term for certain stations which are the nearest to, though at some little distance from, the place from which they are named, as, e.g., Shapwick Road, Mildenhall Road, &c. The

latter words of the verse describe the territory of the Hivites, which reached from Mount Baal-hermon in the Lebanon range as far as the point where the road leads to Hamath.

Ver. 5.—**The Canaanites, &c.** The same enumeration of the tribes of the Canaanites as in Exod. xxxiv. 11.

Ver. 6.—**They took their daughters, &c.** Here is a further downward step in the disobedience of the Israelites. Intermarriage

with the Canaanite nations had been expressly forbidden (Exod. xxxiv. 15, 16; Deut. vii. 3; Josh. xxiii. 12), and the reason of the prohibition clearly stated, and for some time after Joshua's death no such marriages appear to have been contracted. But now the fatal step was taken, and the predicted consequence immediately ensued: "they served their gods; . . . they forgot the Lord their God, and served the Baalim and the Asheroth."

HOMILETICS

Vers. 1—6.—*Ungodly marriages.* The distinctive lesson of this section seems to be the fatal influence of an ungodly marriage. And this lesson is one of such daily importance to Christians in every station in life, that we shall do well to concentrate our attention upon it. On entering upon the history of that troublous and calamitous time for the tribes of Israel which intervened between the triumphant governments of Moses and Joshua and the glorious reigns of David and Solomon,—the time of the Judges,—we find it initiated by the intermarriage of the Israelites with the idolatrous Canaanites. No sooner was that shameful alliance contracted than the national apostasy followed instantly. "They forgot the Lord their God, and served Baalim and Ashteroth." And the connection between this religious apostasy and the first servitude by which they lost their national independence was no less close. "The children of Israel served Chushan-rishathaim." If then we read Scripture with a view to our own admonition, our attention must be arrested by this striking example of the danger of ungodly unions. And the example does not stand alone. The marriage of Esau with the daughters of Heth, in connection with the loss of his birthright and his blessing; the degradation and death of Samson in spite of his splendid gifts and powers; the tarnished fame of Solomon's old age, and the break-up of his kingdom after his death; the dynastic ruin and destruction of Ahab and all his house from his marriage with Jezebel,—these and many other examples in Holy Scripture convey a solemn warning against the peril of ungodly marriages. And it must be so in the nature of things. The marriage union is so close and intimate, it gives the opportunity for such constant influence, it makes continual resistance to that influence so irksome and tedious, it gives such advantage to the working of influence through the affections, that no man with a due regard for his own soul's salvation would expose himself to such peril. Moreover, the true notion of the partnership of marriage is a fellowship in heart, in thought, in affection, in interest; an identity of aim and purpose in life, each helping the other, each contributing a portion to the common aim; a joint action in all that relates to God and man; united counsels in fulfilling the various duties of the home, of the human society, of the Church of God. How could the Israelite, seeking the glory of Jehovah, wrapped up in the triumphs of his own favoured race and pure creed, and hating the detestable abominations of heathenism, so insulting to God, and so injurious to man, have such fellowship with the daughter of an Amorite or Canaanite? And how can any true servant of the Lord Jesus Christ have such fellowship with one whose heart is wholly given up to the world, and has no concern for the kingdom of heaven. "Marriage is not to be taken in hand unadvisedly, lightly, or wantonly by any Christian man or woman, but reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God." And it is the object of these remarks to induce young men and young women, in deciding upon marriage, to take into consideration the probable influence of their partner upon their moral and religious life, and the aid or the hindrance they are likely to have in the fulfilment of their Christian duties. The life-long loss of domestic happiness, the blighting of affections, and a heavy crop of trouble and vexation, the sure fruit of an ill-assorted union, is a heavy price to pay for the momentary gratification of a mere fancy; but the permanent loss of moral tone, and forfeiture of one's place in the kingdom of God, is an unspeakably heavier one.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—4.—*The proving of Israel.* The general lesson of the Book of Judges is here repeated. There is shown to have been a Divine providence prevailing through and above the defections of Israel. God uses the consequences of their neglect as a means of grace. The nations that had not been rooted out became in turn their tempters and their tyrants; and thus they outlive their minority, and are prepared for the great place they have to take in the history of the kingdom of God.

I. IT WAS A RESULT OF PARENTAL NEGLECT. The fathers had left much of their task undone. A determined attitude on their part, and vigorous measures, would have rid the land of the nuisance. One generation may do much good or evil to its successors. We never reap all the results of our own misdoing; a great portion is left for the children of after generations. The neglect of the laws of health, of the canons of a moral life, of educational institutions, social and political progress, may entail grievous disadvantage upon those who come after us; as much that comes in this way, comes in this way alone, and cannot be produced suddenly. And so it is with the growth of theological truth, and the habits and usages of the spiritual life.

II. BUT THE CHILDREN TOO WERE TO BLAME. The oracle of God at Shiloh could have been consulted still. God's will could easily have been ascertained. Thorough and absolute trust in Jehovah, and devotion to his service, would have rid them of their enemies. They were therefore the children of their fathers in this also, viz., that they were not wholly given to God's service and the desire after righteousness. How much of human guilt consists in *mere letting alone*, or in supinely submitting to evils as if they were inevitable or incurable!

III. IT WAS AN INSTANCE OF EVIL DIVINELY UTILISED. A probation. To call forth the courage and faith of the new generation. To prevent them accepting the situation as a final one, or calmly submitting to and acquiescing in the wicked customs and idolatries of their neighbours. Some natures find the way of transgression harder than others. They are finer, more susceptible, have more deeply-set longings after goodness. They feel the inherent contradictions of evil more acutely; its penalties press more heavily upon them. This is not an injustice on the part of their Maker; it is a mark of his goodness and mercy. He would have them fenced in by the sanctions of righteousness; driven back into his fold. He has meant them for a better life. So it was with his elect people then. They and their heathen neighbours were upon a different footing. It was the destiny of Israel not to be let alone. A later experience in order to the comprehension of an earlier experience. One of the most valuable uses of experience—to throw light backward. It reveals the true value of an inheritance, and renders precious things more precious. Otherwise the younger Israelites who entered into the conquests of the first warriors would not have known the severity of their toils, or the mighty hand of God which wrought their deliverance. There are some lessons every man must learn for himself. A true appreciation of God's saving grace is a personal and, for the most part, an incommunicable thing. "*To teach them war*," i. e. to inure them to it as a necessary discipline, and as the preliminary work that had to be done ere the kingdom of God could be brought in; and, as above, to show them how much spiritual privileges cost, and how difficult and yet how honourable it was to defend and secure them. Still it was—

IV. AN INSTANCE OF A PROVISIONAL ALLOWANCE OF COMPARATIVE IMMORALITY. The world was not ripe for the morality of Jesus. The self-contradiction of a continual state of warfare was to be their schoolmaster to bring them to Christ. The *state of peace* is not of itself more moral than that of war. It is "the things that make for peace," the spirit of brotherhood and Christian charity, that are the aim of the righteous mind. The world must first be righteous ere it can be peaceful.—M.

Vers. 5—7.—*The forbidden covenant.* When Israel entered the land it was on the express condition that no terms of marriage or intercommunion should be entered into with the aboriginal tribes of Canaan (Deut. vii. 1—3). This seems either to have been forgotten or deliberately ignored. The consequences predicted came to pass, and the hearts of the people were led away from the worship of the true God.

I. THE LIMITS OF COMMUNION BETWEEN THE CHILDREN OF GOD AND THE WORLD.

The law of extermination prescribed to Israel made the path of duty very clear. It was God's purpose to disentangle the national and individual life of his people from the perversions, corruptions, and self-contradictions of idolatrous worship. He desired to separate them entirely to himself. Severe and uncharitable as this rule might at first appear, it was true mercy to the world as yet unborn, and to the future that was to be redeemed to God. Some comforts and conveniences, a few really valuable fruits of pseudo-civilisation and the contact with the currents of thought and life in the great world of men, had to be sacrificed, but the advantage was more than worth them all. The same problem presents itself to-day to the Christian. How far is it allowable for the life of a child of God and a child of this world to intermingle? What relations of this life are to be kept apart from the world, and to subsist only between Christians, and what relations may be shared with the world? The letter of the ancient prescript is of course obsolete, but the spirit must still be binding. Evidently, however, the relations of what are strictly religious communions can only be sustained between true Christians. And many of the higher relations of our natural life, as, for instance, marriage, can only be worthily sustained by Christians. The spirit of the old law was, immediately, severe, but, ultimately and more largely, merciful. So ought the disposition of the Christian to be. Of course the extent and direction in which we observe this law of heavenly prudence must be left to every man's conscience in the sight of God. It ought to be remembered that often when it seems to act against others it is really for their good.

II. HOW INTIMATE ASSOCIATION WITH THE WORLD AFFECTS THE TONE AND QUALITY OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE. 1. Habit blunts the conscience to unlawful customs. 2. Personal attachments and friendships lend attraction to social and religious observances which are really unrighteous. 3. The relations of civil life create entanglement and perplexity. 4. The peculiar, intimate, and profound relations of marriage add to the force of all influences that affect the religious nature and the spiritual life.—M.

EXPOSITION.

This section introduces us into the actual narrative of the Book of Judges, the prefatory matter being now concluded. The whole book proceeds on the same model as this section does. The apostasy of Israel; their servitude under the oppressor sent to chastise them; their cry of distress and penitence; their deliverance by the judge raised up to save them; the rest which follows their deliverance. There is infinite variety in the details of the successive narratives, but they are all formed on the same plan.

Ver. 7.—**The groves.** The *Asheroth*, here and elsewhere (ch. vi. 25, 26; Deut. xvi. 21, &c.) wrongly rendered *groves*, were large wooden images or pillars in honour of Ash-toreth, and so are properly coupled with *Baalim*. This verse is in fact identical in meaning with ch. ii. 13, of which it is a repetition (see note to ch. ii. 13, and ch. viii. 23).

Ver. 8.—**Chushan-rishathaim**, *i. e.*, as usually explained, Chushan the victorious, or the wicked. His name, Chushan, or Cushan, points to Cush, the father of Nimrod (Gen. x. 6-8), and the seat of his kingdom in *Aram-naharaim*, or Mesopotamia, agrees with Nimrod's kingdom in "Babel

. . . in the land of Shinar" (*ibid.* ver. 10). An earlier invasion of Palestine by conquerors from Mesopotamia is mentioned Gen. xiv. 2, where Amraphel, king of Shinar, is one of the five kings who invaded Sodom. Bela, son of Beor, king of Edom, seems by his name to have been clearly from Mesopotamia, as Balaam the son of Beor was (Numb. xxii. 5; xxiii. 7); and in the time of Job we read of bands of Chaldeans looting in the land of Uz (Job i. 17). *Chushan*, as the name of a people, is coupled with Midian in Hab. iii. 7; but we have no accounts of the state of Mesopotamia at the time of Chushan-rishathaim.

Ver. 9.—**A deliverer.** Hebrew, *Saviour*, as ver. 15 (see Neh. ix. 27). *Othniel*, &c. Mentioned ch. i. 13; Josh. xv. 17, and 1 Chron. iv. 13, where he is placed under "the sons of Kenaz," and seems to be the father of Hathath and Meonothai. According to Judith vi. 15, he had a descendant, *Chabris*, living in the time of Holofernes. The Hebrew, though grammatically it favours the view that Othniel was the brother of Caleb, does not absolutely exclude the rendering that Kenaz was his brother, and so Othniel his nephew. Compare Jer. xxxii. 7, where the words "thine uncle" apply to Shallum, not to Hanameel, as is clear from ver. 8.

And as the chronology seems to make it impossible that Othniel should be Caleb's brother, since Caleb was eighty-five years old at the time of Othniel's marriage, and Othniel therefore could not be less than fifty-five, an improbable age for his marriage; and since, again, Othniel could not well have been less than eighty at Joshua's death, which, allowing only ten years for the elders, and reckoning the eight years for Chushan's dominion, would make him ninety-eight when he was raised up to deliver Israel, it is a lesser difficulty to take Othniel as the nephew of Caleb, by understanding the words, *Caleb's younger brother*, to apply to Kenaz. But perhaps the least objectionable escape from the difficulty is to take the phrase in its most natural grammatical sense, but to understand the word *brother* in its wider and very common sense of *kinsman* or *fellow-tribesman*. They were both sons of Kenaz, or Kenizzites. Caleb was the head of the

tribe, and Othniel was next to him in tribal dignity, and his junior in age, but probably succeeded to the chieftainship on Caleb's death. This would leave the exact relationship between Caleb and Othniel uncertain.

Ver. 10.—*And the Spirit, &c.* This marks Othniel as one of the extraordinary *Shophetim*, or judges, Divinely commissioned to save Israel (see ch. vi. 34; xi. 29; xiii. 25; xiv. 6, 19).

Ver. 11.—*And Othniel, &c.* The arrangement of this verse suggests that Othniel lived through the whole forty years of rest, but this is highly improbable. The first part of the verse only belongs to the preceding section, which it closes quite naturally. The result of Othniel's victories was a rest of forty years (cf. ver. 30; v. 31; viii. 28, &c.). The latter half of the verse—*And Othniel the son of Kenaz died*—begins a new section, and is introductory to the first apostasy, which followed after his death.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 7—11.—*God's scourge.* In a remarkable passage (Deut. xxxii. 8) Moses tells us that when the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel. In like manner the sacred history teaches us how the movements of the nations and the restless invasions and conquests of heathen kings and warriors had a special relation to the chosen race. They indeed did not mean so. They were actuated merely by ambition, by the lust of conquest, by the appetite for plunder and dominion. But in the wonderful providence of God they were made instruments for chastening and correcting, or for saving and delivering, his people, as the case might be. Here we find the unsettled state of the Mesopotamian tribes, which led them beyond the borders of their own land, bringing them to Palestine at the very time when the Israelites in the wantonness of their fickle hearts had fallen away from the service of the living and true God to that of the idols of Canaan. There they were living at ease, having partly extirpated the Canaanites, and partly entered into league and amity with them. Seduced by their vices, captivated by their sensuous religion, they had forgotten all the works of God, and no longer trembled at his word, and did not feel their need of his favour. Yet a little while and their apostasy would have been complete, and the very end of their election would have failed. But this was not to be. So Chushan-rishathaim, who had perhaps never heard of their names, and knew nothing of their religion or of their apostasy, mustered his hosts, marched his army, and at the critical moment fell like a rod upon the peccant people. We are left to imagine the misery of those eight years of servitude under a heathen tyrant: the injuries and indignities, the terror and unrest, the grinding servitude, the hard bondage, the bitterness of soul, the wasting and oppression of spirit. The crops for which they toiled eaten by another; their goodly houses tenanted by their foes, and themselves turned into the street; their wives and daughters bondwomen, and their sons made slaves; their national glory turned to shame, their cherished hopes withered into despair. And we are left to imagine how that misery bent the iron sinew of their neck, and brought them back to God. No doubt their self-confidence was broken down. Their illusive dreams of pleasure had ended in an awakening to their self-inflicted pain; sin appeared in its true colours as an enemy and betrayer; the false gods were found to be no helpers. Why not turn to God? He had been very good to them. Why had they ever forsaken him? He and he alone could save them, as he had saved their fathers from the hands of Pharaoh. But would he? They would try. They would turn to him in penitence and prayer; they would confess their

sins; they would humble themselves in his sight; they would call upon his blessed name; they would plead his covenant, his promises, the glory of his own great name. And they did so. Nor did they call in vain. Their cry of distress entered into the ears of the Lord of hosts. His wrath turned to pity; he who chastened when they sinned, now comforted when they prayed. He had sent a scourge; he now sends a deliverer. Chushan was invincible when his mission was to strike; but when his mission was ended his arm fell broken at his side. Othniel the deliverer went forth in the might of God's Spirit, and Chushan's power was gone. The waters of the Euphrates which had overflowed their banks were dried up again, and the land of Israel had rest for forty years. And so has it ever been. The obscurer movements of Philistines, and Ammonites, and Midianites, as well as the grand historic drama of Assyria, and Egypt, and Babylon, and Persia, and Greece, and Rome, have always had one special design in the correction or deliverance of God's people. And though we have no inspired interpreter to expound to us the later movements of the peoples, yet may we be sure that the great events of modern history have been appointed to work out the purposes of God with reference to his Church, either for correction or deliverance, and that the rise and fall of empires, the ambition of kings and statesmen, the conquests of warriors, and the revolutions of peoples, will in the end be found to have been overruled for the glory of God, and for the extension of the kingdom of Jesus our Lord. And in this confidence the Church may rest and be at ease in her integrity, while she is careful not to provoke God's anger by turning aside from his truth, or growing weary of his blessed service.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 8.—*Idolatry and its Nemesis.* The effects of this communion with idolatrous peoples speedily appear. It was no accident that Israel became the subject of a heathen power, nor are we to suppose it an arbitrary exercise of the right of Divine providence.

I. AS FAITH STRENGTHENS, SUPERSTITION DESTROYS, MORAL POWER. In all these punishments the external and physical disadvantage appears to be the first perceived. But the real loss was sustained beforehand, when faith in the one God was lost. The whole moral life which this dogma encouraged and sustained was thereby undermined. Monotheism was the foundation of the moral life, correcting and purifying it; idolatry pandered to the worst passions, and chained the spirit of man to the outward and sensuous.

II. MORAL ENTHUSIASM IS THE ESSENCE AND INSPIRATION OF HEROISM AND THE RULING QUALITIES. The reverence of Israel in the worship of Jehovah was called forth towards qualities that were truly noble and admirable. The sustaining force of an Israelite's piety was absolutely righteous and super-sensuous; and it had appeared superior to all that the arm of flesh could bring against it. The Israelite was taught, therefore, to despise the material, the outward, and the merely human. His faith, therefore, became heroic. And as the influence of the Divine Being repressed the passions and developed the spiritual power, it enabled him to restrain himself, to pursue after distant and vast aims; and, in making him heedless of the attractions of sense and penalties which only affected the outward man, it made him influential over others. Hence the religion of Israel marked it out for political superiority and power.

III. THE "SERVICE" THAT IS WASTED ON WORTHLESS OBJECTS IS AVENGED BY A "SERVICE" THAT IS SEVERE AND INVOLUNTARY. This was the result of a special appointment, and also of a Divine law. The people that had become effeminate by idolatrous indulgence were an easy prey to any military and ambitious power; and so that which had been a weak yielding, or a choice, became binding and imperative. National liberty was lost; the purest and noblest traits of national character were repressed. What a special political power did in this instance evil habit itself may do; and there are other influences whose yoke waits upon the loss of moral power.—M.

Vers. 9, 10.—*True deliverance must ever come from God.* It is a curious fact in the history of Israel that it is never until they have acknowledged God as the source

of salvation that they achieve any permanent success. It is as if this people were to learn that only by supernatural means is it ever to fulfil its destiny.

I. HE INSPIRES TRUE HEROISM. Of Othniel we have already heard; he stands as a representative of early Israelitish chivalry. But on the occasion on which he distinguished himself formerly, the inspiration was hardly so lofty as to mark him out as especially the servant of God. He is, however, on the threshold of the great life of self-denial and generous self-sacrifice which characterised the judge of Israel. He is a vessel chosen of God for better service. Of the particular influences which marked him out for the high office to which he was called we are not informed. All that we know is, that the Spirit of the Lord came upon him. That he was well qualified otherwise for warlike exploits we know; but the merely human traits of character which he has displayed are nothing without this distinctive inspiration. God finds the man for the hour.

II. THE MORAL AUTHORITY IS DIVINELY CREATED. Israel gravitates towards Othniel as its moral centre. By a kind of moral necessity he becomes its judge, and there is no one to dispute his ascendancy. The prestige which he gains in his magistracy is not injured by military failures. We are to look upon all this as proof that God was with him, preserving and increasing his reputation, and developing the powers which he possessed. When it is said (ch. ii. 18), "And when the Lord raised them up judges, then the Lord was with the judge, and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge," we are invited to behold no series of merely human successes, but that which is directly due to his presence and help. And so with all whom he inspires for special service; he will make their moral influence his care, sustain their strength, and secure uninterrupted success if they put their trust in him.—M.

Natural advantages and endowments perfected and crowned by consecration. **I. THE BEST CHANNEL FOR OTHNIEL'S ABILITIES WAS THAT INDICATED BY THE DIVINE CALL.**

II. IN OBEDIENCE OF GOD'S SPIRIT HE SECURED THE MOST COMMANDING INFLUENCE.

III. AS SERVANT OF JEHOVAH HE ATTAINED ENDURING RENOWN.—M.

Vers. 10, 11.—The secret of individual and national greatness. It was as a judge of Israel that Othniel first attained influence. This necessitated a righteous life and a consistent character. In this way he obtained command over his people, and was able to transfer their attachment and respect to the battle-field. So it was, as Israel learned to obey the servant of Jehovah in civil affairs, and learned to respect the law of righteousness, that it was able to face its enemies with an irresistible front. It is righteousness that exalteth a nation and a man.

I. TO MAINTAIN AND ADVANCE A RIGHTEOUS CAUSE WE MUST BEGIN AT HOME.

II. THE VICTORY OVER OUR ENEMIES CONSISTS MORE THAN HALF IN THE VICTORY OVER OURSELVES.

III. HABITUAL RECTITUDE AND A GOOD CONSCIENCE PREPARE FOR SUDDEN AND ABIDING SUCCESS.—M.

Ver. 11. — "And the land had rest"—the true peace. **I. IT IS A REWARD OF CONSECRATED EFFORT AND SELF-DENIAL.**

II. A PREPARATION FOR HIGHER CONCEPTIONS AND REALISATIONS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.

III. A SABBATH OF CONSECRATED TIME AND SERVICE TO THE HIGHEST.—M.

Vers. 9, 10.—Great men. The Book of Judges brings before us the heroic age of Israel. The multitude of the people are in a condition of moral and political degradation, but great men appear from time to time whose individual heroism secures the salvation of their nation. Othniel, the first of the judges, may serve as a type of the rest. The characters and mission of these men may throw some light upon the function of great men in the economy of Providence.

I. GREAT MEN OWE THEIR GREATNESS TO GOD. Many of the judges sprang from obscure families; they were not hereditary rulers, but men sent of God with individual vocations. Othniel belonged to the honourable family of Caleb, and shared

JUDGES.

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in the fame of that family, perhaps, partly in virtue of hereditary qualities. But even he is described as owing his greatness to God. 1. Great men are *sent* by God. When the people "cried unto the Lord, the Lord raised up a deliverer." There are men who are born heroes—men whose great qualities are owing to their nature, not to their culture or their conduct. He who believes in providence will recognise that such men are "raised up" by God. 2. Great men *derive their highest powers directly* from God. "The Spirit of the Lord came upon Othniel." The military and political ability of Othniel as warrior and judge are ascribed to a Divine inspiration. All truly great men are inspired by God. Not only are they originally formed and sent by God, but they owe their powers to the constant influence of God within them. Bad men of genius receive their genius from God, and are therefore guilty of prostituting the noblest Divine gift to evil purposes. Such men attain to no more than an earthly greatness. In the sight of God their low aims destroy the character of heroism which their abilities rendered possible. On the other hand, all Christians may attain to a measure of greatness in proportion as they receive the Spirit of God; yet we must distinguish between the graces of the Spirit, which are for all Christians, and the gifts of the Spirit, which are special, and bestowed on individual men.

II. GREAT MEN HAVE A MISSION TO THEIR FELLOW-MEN. 1. *Great men are intrusted with great talents for the benefit of others.* To devote these to selfish ends of ambition or pleasure is a mark of gross unfaithfulness. We are members one of another; and that member which has the highest capacities will produce the largest amount of harm if it refuses to perform its functions in promoting the welfare of the whole body. 2. *Great men are needed by the world.* The heroic age has passed, and there is now more power in the general thought and life of men than in primitive times. The work of individual men has often been overrated when compared with the deep, silent strength of public opinion, and the slow, steady movement of national progress. Yet it is real and large. Christianity would have lived if Paul had never been converted; the Reformation would have come without Luther. But these movements would have taken a different form, and probably would have made much slower progress without the help of their leading spirits. Great inventors, legislators, reformers have left a distinct individual stamp on the history of our race. Christianity is not a product of the spirit of its age; it owes its origin to the life of the greatest of men.

III. THE MISSION OF GREAT MEN VARIES ACCORDING TO THE NEEDS OF THEIR AGE. In the heroic age of Israel the great men are warriors who deliver the people from the yoke of invaders; later they appear as kings who lay the foundations of constitutional government, *e.g.* David and Solomon; later as prophets, &c. Perhaps the gifts for all varieties of excellence exist in every age, but a natural selection brings to light only those which are suitable for each particular age. But possibly there is a providential economy which shapes the great man according to the needs of his age. In either case it is clear that there is a breadth and variety of Divine inspiration, so that we cannot limit it to any one form of manifestation, nor deny that it may be found in some novel and startling shape as the requirements of the world assume new features.—A.

EXPOSITION.

Ver. 13.—**The children of Ammon.** The technical name of the Ammonite people (see Gen. xix. 38; Deut. ii. 19, 37; Judges x. 6, 11, 17, &c.). Sometimes, however, they are called *Ammon*, or *Ammonites* (see Deut. xxiii. 3; 1 Sam. xi. 11, &c.). *Amalek*, or the *Amalekites*, were the hereditary enemies of Israel (see Exod. xvii. 8—16; Judges v. 14; vi. 3, 33; vii. 12; 1 Sam. xv. 2, &c.). The Amalekites appear, from Gen. xxxvi. 12, to have been a branch of the Edomites, and the latest mention of them in the Bible finds a

remnant of them in the neighbourhood of Mount Seir in the days of Hezekiah (1 Chron. iv. 41—43). **The city of palm trees**, *i. e.* Jericho, as Deut. xxxiv. 3; Judges i. 16. Jericho was the first city in Canaan which any one crossing the fords of the Jordan would come to (see Josh. ii. 1; vi. 1, &c.). Though no longer a fenced city, it was important from the fertility of the plain, and from its commanding the fords.

Ver. 15.—**Left-handed.** It was a peculiarity of the warriors of the tribe of Benjamin

to be left-handed (see ch. xx. 16; 1 Chron. xii. 2). A left-handed man wearing no sword or dagger on his left side, and using his right hand for other purposes, would naturally throw a man off his guard. Thus Joab took Amasa by the beard with his right hand to kiss him, and then smote him with the sword in his left hand (2 Sam. xx. 10). A deliverer. Hebrew, a saviour (ver. 9). A present, i. e. their tribute.

Ver. 19.—*The quarries.* It is uncertain whether this is the meaning of the Hebrew word. Its common meaning is *images*, as Deut. vii. 25, and elsewhere.

Ver. 20.—*For himself alone.* It seems to have been Eglon's habit to sit quite alone in this summer parlour for coolness sake, his attendants waiting in the adjoining antechamber. On this occasion he appears to have dismissed them from the antechamber, for greater privacy, while Ehud spake to him.

Ver. 22.—*The haft, &c.* Ehud, feeling the necessity of killing Eglon at one blow, plunged the dagger into his body with such force that the handle went in with the blade, and he was unable to draw it out. Leaving it, therefore, buried in his fat, he *went out* at once into the *parshedon*, or antechamber, for so it is best to render the last words of the verse, and thence into the *misederon*, the outer porch, having first locked the door of the summer chamber. The words *parshedon* and *misederon* occur only here, and the former is very variously rendered.

Ver. 24.—*Covereth his feet, i. e. is asleep* (see 1 Sam. xxiv. 3). The servants, finding the door locked, and all quiet within, con-

cluded that he was taking his *siesta* in the heat of the day.

Ver. 26.—*The quarries.* See above, ver. 19. *Seirath*, or rather *has-seirath*, is not known as the name of a place. It seems to mean the *rough* or woody district, the forest in the hill country of Ephraim, where there was good shelter to hide in.

Ver. 27.—*He blew a trumpet.* Like Alfred in the marshes of Somerset, he gathered a host around him in the shelter of the forest; and then, full of faith in his Divine mission, "strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might," dashed down boldly into the plain, and, seizing the fords, cut off all communication between the Moabites at Jericho and their countrymen east of the Jordan. They could neither escape into Moab nor get help from Moab. Thrown into confusion by the death of their king and the suddenness of the attack, the Moabites fell to the number of 10,000 men; and so ended the second servitude, to be followed by a rest (if the numeral in the text is sound) of eighty years.

Ver. 31.—*Of the Philistines.* This is an isolated movement of the Philistines, alluded to in ch. x. 11, but of which we have no further details. In ch. x. 6 we read of Israel worshipping the gods of the Philistines, and of an alliance between the Ammonites and Philistines to vex Israel; but the precise connection between the events of the two chapters, or the exact time when either occurred, cannot be determined with certainty. Nothing more is known of Shamgar, except the mention of him in Deborah's song (ch. v. 6).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 12—31.—*Miscellaneous Thoughts.* Sin and punishment, repentance and ready mercy, prayer and answer to prayer, and the providential government of God, ordering all things after the counsel of his own will, are the general subjects which the course of the narrative still sets before us. But other questions of considerable difficulty arise from the history of Ehud to which we shall do well to direct our attention. To avoid repetition the analogous case of Jael recorded in ch. iv. may be considered at the same time.

I. MORAL PROBLEMS. Ehud and Jael are both represented to us as signal deliverers raised up by God to save Israel from his oppressors. Ehud holds a conspicuous place among the judges, and Jael is declared in the song of Deborah to be "blessed among women." But if we try this hero and this heroine by the standard of morality set up by Christianity and by modern Christian civilisation, we find that they were both guilty of acts of assassination coupled with deceit and treachery. Ehud deceived Eglon into his confidence by pretending to have a message to deliver to him from God, and then stabbed him; and Jael enticed Sisera into her tent with the offer of hospitality that she might murder him in his sleep. Some commentators on this history have justified both these actions on the dangerous ground that they were done by God's special command, and that what would in themselves have been crimes became virtues under the dispensing power of God's sovereign will. But such an explanation is neither warranted by Scripture nor satisfactory in itself. The true explanation is to be found in deeper views of God's providential government of the

world, by which man's free will is reconciled with the sovereignty of God. It is manifest that, given the existence of evil in the world, and given the truth that the Most High doeth according to his will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth, it must be that bad actions as well as good ones subserve and bring about the purposes of God. That Jacob's deceit obtained his father's blessing, or that the malice of the Jews brought about the great sacrifice of the death of Christ, are no proofs that God approves either deceit or malice, but are merely instances how man's free-will, whether choosing good or evil, brings about the will of God—a truth which, however unfathomable to our reason, we can see to be necessary to the existence of the government of the world. This view, too, while it does not disturb our trust in the perfect righteousness of God, confirms our trust in the absolute sovereignty of his power. It leaves to the righteous a sense of perfect security amidst the perplexing spectacles of wrong and wickedness triumphing for a time.

II. GOOD AND EVIL IN THE SAME HUMAN WILL. But are we then to set down Ehud and Jael among the wicked of the earth? By no means. But we must turn to another difficult problem, the co-existence of good and evil in the same human will. It is a simple fact, borne witness to by profane as well as sacred history, that in individuals the main bent of whose character is towards good, a great amount of evil may remain, when such evil is countenanced by the public opinion of their day, and by the practice of their contemporaries. Just as even wise men retain many gross popular errors in science till they are refuted and exploded by the light of new discoveries, so even good men remain unconsciously under the dominion of special evils till some new light has shined upon them and exposed their real nature. The cruelty of our penal laws down to the present century, the existence of the slave-trade and of slavery within our own memory, persecution unto cruel deaths for religious opinions, the severities of arbitrary governments till exploded in the light of freedom, are familiar examples how things evil in themselves may be approved by good and humane men when they are sanctioned by prevalent custom and by public opinion. And the observation of these and numerous analogous facts teaches us the folly as well as the injustice of judging men of one age by the standard of another. Turning then to Ehud and Jael, we know that in their days human life was not more valued than it is in Afghanistan to the present hour. We know that the life of an enemy was looked upon as a lawful and desirable prey to be seized whenever possible. We know that, in times when the weak have no protection from the strong by the action of law, the only weapon of defence that remains to them, that of cunning and deceit, becomes sharpened by constant use, and is habitually worn at their side. Guile in communities where there is no justice is not the exception but the rule, and feigned blandishments have a tendency to increase the fierceness which they were intended to conceal, when the time for concealment is past. When, therefore, Ehud and Jael in their respective times saw the people of God whom they loved trampled underfoot by cruel tyrants and oppressors; when they saw the glory of God in whom they believed profaned by the triumphs of idolatry; when they heard the cries and groans of those who were reduced to bondage and were plundered of their lands; when indignation burnt in their hearts, and the blush of shame rose to their cheek, for the indignities which the people suffered at heathen hands—can we wonder that their generous hearts planned vengeance and deliverance, and that they accomplished their purpose by such weapons as came to hand. Violence was no crime, deceit was no sin in their eyes. They had not, it is true, the grace to wait in patient faith, and to say, "How long, O Lord?" but they had the fervent zeal and the heroic courage to take their lives in their hands and risk it freely for their country and their God. They had the noble spirit of self-sacrifice, seeking nothing for themselves, ready to give all they had on the altar of religion and patriotism. They had the faith in God which marks the saint, and the disdain of danger which marks the hero. And so he who in his compassionate estimate of human conduct accepts a man according to what he hath and not according to what he hath not, accepted their virtues and covered their sin, even as we hope he will accept us when we act up to the light given to us, even though our best deeds are mixed up with sin, and our holiest works fall immeasurably short of the purity and holiness of God.

III. THE CONCLUSION WHICH WE THUS ARRIVE AT IS, THAT GOD'S PURPOSE OF DELIVER-

ANCE TO HIS CHURCH MAY BE ACCOMPLISHED BY BAD MEN AS WELL AS BY GOOD, and by bad as well as good actions; that the degree in which good men fall short of the glory of God varies widely according to their opportunities; and that God graciously accepts the thoughts and intents of loving and faithful hearts in spite of sin committed in ignorance of his will, dealing with men's souls through the infinite merits of the death of his dear Son, and with respect to the full satisfaction of his atoning blood—to whom be glory and praise for ever and ever! We learn also to take a juster view of the great figures which are set before us in Holy Scripture. They are not ideal figures or perfect characters. They are faithful delineations of the real lives of men and women who lived two or three thousand years ago; who stood up head and shoulders above their contemporaries in certain great gifts and qualities, but who necessarily partook of the character of the age they lived in. While we try to emulate their faith, we must judge of their actions by the light of the perfect law of God.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 12—14.—*Continued and repeated offence entails more signal punishment.* Jehovah is spoken of here as if he had become the God of heathen nations. He takes the side of the enemies of Israel, and strengthens them for the subjugation of his own people.

I. THE INSTRUMENT OF CHASTISEMENT IS SPECIALLY PREPARED BY GOD.

II. A VISIBLE SIGN OF DISGRACE EXISTED IN THE CONQUEST OF JERICHO.

III. THE PERIOD OF OPPRESSION WAS MORE THAN DOUBLED.—M.

Vers. 15—26.—*Ehud.* There is no grandeur of character about Ehud, nor can he boast of an illustrious descent; yet he is sufficient for the purpose of delivering Israel. The defectiveness of the instrument makes the Divine agent the more conspicuous. We see here:—

I. GOD'S USE OF OBSCURE AGENTS AND INSTRUMENTALITIES. He was of the less important tribe; personally obscure; physically defective. So God uses the weak things of this world to confound the mighty, &c., that the praise may be given to the true source of power and wisdom. On the present occasion the choice was singularly felicitous, as it emphasised both subjection and deliverance as Divine. The left-handedness of Ehud also becomes curiously and instructively prominent. His very defect proved his fitness for the special task he had to accomplish. Is his power but a one-sided one, and hardly available for regular service? If he be in earnest an opportunity will be given for its effective use. It is exacted by God's servants that they do what they can; the rest is to be left with himself.

II. DEFECTIVE POWERS AND CHARACTER RESTRICTED TO THEIR PROPER SPHERE. We can see from the history that the moral character of Ehud is not high. His success, humanly speaking, depended on duplicity, boldness, sleight of hand. He has decision enough to improve upon the advantage which he has thus obtained, and to weaken the enemy by a terrible blow. But there is no sign of the judicial faculty, nor even of great military skill. He rendered a signal service, and then apparently retired into obscurity. He held no high office, or great public responsibility.—M.

Ver. 31.—*Shamgar.* A long interval has elapsed. The moral effect of Ehud's feat is beginning to lessen. Another warning is required. It is given from the opposite side of Israel in the incursion of six hundred Philistines. These are not many, but they may be spies, pickets, the vanguard of great armies. If any effect is to be produced upon those who are behind them it must be by a sudden and decisive blow. The example of Ehud is a precedent. Another hero rises to deliver Israel at a stroke. And by a rude and apparently ill-adapted weapon. Shamgar illustrates:—

I. THE INFLUENCE OF EXAMPLE. "After him"—an Ehud inspires a Shamgar.

II. OF THE GREAT EFFECTS WHICH MAY BE PRODUCED BY IMPERFECT MEANS WHEN ZEALOUSLY AND SEASONABLY USED. The slaying of the six hundred deterred perhaps a whole series of invasions. It lent itself easily to poetic treatment, and appeared

to popular imagination. The inspiration of the deed was unmistakable. A common man, a rude implement used by Jehovah at a set time for the deliverance of his people.

III. OF THE SIGNIFICANCE AND VALUE OF A SINGLE GREAT DEED. We hear nothing of Shamgar before or after. 1. *Its greatness lay in the agent rather than the means.* Previous preparation of character was required. 2. *The moral effect was sudden, wide-spread, and decisive.* God used it for a greater purpose than was immediately contemplated. 3. *But it did not qualify for permanent official usefulness.* It was followed up by no spiritual witness, or succession of services. It might be that Shamgar outlived his fame, or obscured it by unworthy life, &c. The constant service ought to supplement the individual exploit.—M.

Ver. 15.—*A man left-handed.* The left-handed man may be regarded as a type of the abnormal, the eccentric. The existence and position of such people deserves notice.

I. THE PROVIDENTIAL GOODNESS OF GOD PERMITS PECULIAR VARIATIONS FROM THE NORMAL TYPE OF HUMANITY. God does not form all men according to one exact pattern. There is great variety in the nature, capacity, position, and vocation of men. While most are more or less near to the central type, some are far removed from it. 1. Such people should be *treated with delicacy and consideration.* In the present instance the variation is too slight to be an affliction, but in more severe cases the sufferers are likely to be painfully conscious of their peculiarity. Christian courtesy will devise means of making this as little apparent as possible. 2. The *common human likeness* which belongs to all men should be recognised beneath the few discrepancies which strike us forcibly just because they contrast with the multitudinous points of agreement. The peculiarities are superficial. The deeper nature is true to the normal type of the great human family. The left-handed man has the same heart as the right-handed man. If we had more breadth of sympathy, more care for real and deep human qualities, and less regard for superficial and trivial points, we should recognise more genuine humanity in the most eccentric people. 3. Peculiarities of constitution should be borne with *calm faith* in the wisdom and goodness of God. They may be severe enough to constitute a heavy cross. Yet they come from the hand of our Father who will not willingly afflict. It is well therefore to proceed to see how they may be turned to good account, or how the evil of them may be ameliorated.

II. DIRECT ADVANTAGES MAY BE DERIVED FROM THE PECULIARITIES OF ABNORMAL CONSTITUTIONS. Ehud is able to effect his terrible purpose the more securely through the surprise occasioned by his unexpected action (ver. 21). It is foolish to aim at eccentricity, because such an aim would result in abnormal habits without abnormal capacities. But where the peculiarity is natural it must be regarded as providential, and we should then cast about to see if it may not be turned to some advantage, so that the thing which appears at first as nothing but a hindrance may be found a source of some special aptitude. If the peculiarity be a positive affliction, it may enable those who suffer from it to sympathise with and help their companions in similar affliction. Thus the blind may have a mission to the blind. If the peculiarity compel an unusual manner of acting it may be the means of accomplishing some special but much-needed work.

III. PECULIAR DISADVANTAGES IN ONE DIRECTION ARE OFTEN COMPENSATED FOR BY PECULIAR ADVANTAGES IN ANOTHER. The man who is weak in the right hand, is left-handed, i. e. he has special strength and skill with his left hand. The blind often have a rare skill in music. Muscular weakness is often accompanied by intellectual strength, deficient health by fine spiritual powers. Therefore instead of complaining of the peculiarity with which he is tried it would be well if the person who suffered under it were to be thankful for the special advantages with which he may be favoured. No peculiarity which may seem to exclude from the advantages of human society will sever from the love of God or from the sympathy of Christ the Good Physician.—A.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER IV.

Ver. 2.—**Sold them.** See ch. ii. 14, note. **Jabin king of Hazor.** The exact site of Hazor has not been identified with certainty, but it is conjectured by Robinson, with great probability, to have stood on the Tell now called *Khuraibeh*, overlooking the waters of Merom (now called Lake Hüleh), where are remains of a sepulchre, Cyclopean walls, and other buildings. In Josh. xi. 1—14 we read of the total destruction by fire of Hazor, and of the slaughter of Jabin, the king thereof, with all the inhabitants of the city, and of the slaughter of all the confederate kings, and the capture of their cities; Hazor, however, “the head of all those kingdoms,” being the only one which was “burnt with fire.” It is a little surprising, therefore, to read here of another Jabin reigning in Hazor, with confederate kings under him (ch. v. 19), having, like his predecessor, a vast number of chariots (cf. ch. iv. 3, 13 with Josh. xi. 4, 9), and attacking Israel at the head of a great force (cf. ch. iv. 7, 13, 16 with Josh. xi. 4). It is impossible not to suspect that these are two accounts of the same event. If, however, the two events are distinct, we must suppose that the Canaanite kingdoms had been revived under a descendant of the former king, that Hazor had been rebuilt, and that Jabin was the hereditary name of its king. **Gentiles, or nations, or Goim,** as Josh. xii. 23, and Gen. xiv. 1. Whether *Goim* was the proper name of a particular people, or denoted a collection of different tribes, their seat was in Galilee, called in Isa. ix. 1; Matt. iv. 15, *Galilee, of the nations, or Gentiles*, in Hebrew *Goim*.

Ver. 5.—**The palm tree of Deborah.** The tree, which was probably still standing in the writer's time, was known as “the palm tree of Deborah,” just as a certain oak tree in the forest of Hoxne, in Suffolk, was known for many hundred years as King Edmund's oak.

Ver. 6.—**Kedesh-naphtali, i. e. Kedesh** in the tribe of Naphtali (Josh. xix. 37), as distinguished from Kedesh in the south of Judah (Josh. xv. 23), and others. It still keeps the name of *Kades*, and lies four miles north-west of Lake Hüleh. There are numerous ancient remains. **Hath not the Lord, &c.** She speaks as “a prophetess,” announcing God's commands, not her own opinions; declaring God's promises, not merely her own hopes or wishes.

Ver. 10.—**Called, or rather gathered together,** as the same word is rendered in ver. 13. **Went up, viz., to Mount Tabor,** as in

vers. 6 and 12. Translate the verse. *There went up ten thousand men at his feet, i. e. following him.*

Ver. 11.—Translate, *Now Heber the Kenite had severed himself from the Kenites, viz., from the sons of Hobab, &c.* The Kenites, as we read in ch. i. 16, had settled in the wilderness of Judah, south of Arad, in the time of Joshua. Heber, with a portion of the tribe, had migrated later to Naphtali, probably at the time when the Philistines were pressing hard upon Judah, in the days of Shamgar and Jael (ch. iii. 31 and v. 5).

Ver. 13.—**Unto the river (or brook) of Kishon,** now the Nahr Mukâtta. In the plain of Esdraelon, through which the Kishon flowed into the Mediterranean, there would be room for all his chariots to come into action.

Ver. 14.—**And Deborah, &c.** Observe how throughout Deborah takes the lead as the inspired prophetess.

Ver. 15.—**The Lord discomfited, &c.** Deborah had announced that the Lord was gone out before the host of Barak, and so the victory was not man's, but the Lord's. “Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.” “The Lord is a man of war, the Lord of hosts is his name.” **Sisera lighted down off his chariot, &c., and—**

Ver. 16.—**Barak pursued after the chariots.** Barak, supposing Sisera still to be with the chariots, pursued after them, and seems to have overtaken them, as they were embarrassed in the rotten, boggy ground which had been suddenly overflowed by the swollen waters of Kishon. Many were swept away by the flood and drowned, the rest put to the sword while their horses were floundering in the bog (ch. v. 21, 22). But Sisera had meanwhile escaped on foot unnoticed, and fled to the tents of the friendly Kenites.

Ver. 18.—**With a mantle.** Rather, “with the coverlet,” such as was always at hand in the nomad tent.

Ver. 19.—**A little water.** Faint and thirsty as he was, he did not ask for strong drink, but only water.

Ver. 21.—**Then Jael, &c.** Sisera, having taken every precaution, had lain him down to rest; not, like David, trusting to the Lord to make him dwell in safety, but confiding in Jael's friendship and his own crafty directions. But no sooner had he fallen into a deep sleep, than the crafty and courageous woman, into whose hands Sisera was to be sold, took a tent pin and the heavy hammer with which they drove the pin into the ground, and with a desperate blow

forced it through his temples, and pinned him to the ground. Without a struggle, he swooned and died. Instead of **and fastened it into the ground**, it is better to translate, *that it* (the pin) *came down to the ground*. It is the same word as is translated *lighted* Josh. xv. 18. In the last clause put the full-stop after *asleep*, and read, *So he swooned*

and died. It is impossible for us to view Jael's act in the same light as her contemporaries did, on account of its treachery and cruelty; but we can admire her faith in the God of Israel, her love for the people of God, and her marvellous courage and strength of mind in carrying out her purpose, and make allowance for the age in which she lived.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—22.—*The variety of God's instruments. The weakness of God's instruments.* Nothing is more remarkable in the history of God's providential dealings with his people, whether under the Old or New Testament dispensations, than the great variety of instruments by which he carries out his designs. And amidst this variety a marked feature often is the weakness in themselves of those instruments by which the greatest results are accomplished. "God," says St. Paul to the Corinthians, "hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty, . . . that no flesh should glory in his presence" (1 Cor. i. 27—29). "We have this treasure," he says again, "in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us" (2 Cor. iv. 7). THESE TWO FEATURES OF VARIETY IN THE CHOICE OF INSTRUMENTS, AND OF THE WEAKNESS OF TIMES OF THE INSTRUMENTS THEMSELVES, RUN THROUGH THE BIBLE. To look only at the deliverances in the Book of Judges,—Othniel the Kenite, a stranger and a foreigner; Ehud, the left-handed Benjamite; Shamgar, the son of Anath, armed with an ox-goad; Barak, the timid, hesitating Naphtalite; Gideon, one of the least of a poor family of Manasseh, threshing his wheat secretly for fear of the Midianites, and then rushing upon the Midianite camp with his 300 followers, armed with lamps and pitchers and trumpets; Jephthah, the wild outcast Gileadite; and Samson, the man of supernatural strength, with his impulsive actions and his unrestrained passions,—what an infinite variety do they display of character, of circumstance, and of resource. And so the manna in the wilderness, the drying up of the waters of the Red Sea, the flight of quails, the falling of the walls of Jericho at the blast of the trumpet, the ministry of Samuel, the character and kingdom of David, the grand episode of Elijah the Tishbite, the deliverance of Hezekiah from the army of Sennacherib, the succession of the prophets, the great figure of Daniel, and the countless other incidents and personages which stand out in the pages of Holy Scripture, how largely do they exemplify the manifold resources of the power of God, working out his ends with unerring wisdom and unfailing certainty. The present chapter supplies another striking example. Here we see the Israelites in extreme distress: their independence gone; a great heathen power overshadowing and oppressing them by military violence; all means of resistance at an end; their princes slaves; their warriors cowed; their leaders dispersed. But their time of deliverance was come. And who were they that should break that iron yoke, and let the oppressed go free? who were they before whose might the heathen hosts should melt away, the iron chariots be burnt with fire, and the invincible chieftain be laid low in death? Two women! One known only for her prophetic speech and her skill in civil judgment; the other an alien, belonging to a weak and broken tribe of foreigners. The one, filled with the spirit of God, awakens the sleeping spirit of a captain and 10,000 of her countrymen, and urges them to battle and to victory; the other, alone and unaided, with her single hand slays the leader of unnumbered hosts. The people are set free from their oppressors, and have rest for forty years. The lesson then which this chapter impresses upon us, in addition to those which it teaches in common with the preceding, is the variety and the strangeness of the methods of God's deliverances, and especially THAT GOD'S STRENGTH IS MADE PERFECT IN HUMAN WEAKNESS. He ordains strength in the hands of weak women, as well as out of the mouths of babes and sucklings. "Fear not, thou worm Jacob; I will help thee, saith the Lord," is an exhortation which under every possible circumstance is made easy to comply with by the recollection of these wonderful acts of God.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—11.—*Temporary influences and a permanent tendency.* In this section are presented several influences, such as affect the life of man in every age—the personal influence of Ehud, the material or physical influence of Sisera, and the spiritual influence of Deborah. In judging of conduct we must take into account all the circumstances that are brought to bear upon a person or a nation. The penalties inflicted will then appear reasonable or otherwise.

I. THE PERMANENT TENDENCY TO EVIL. “*When Ehud was dead*” should be “*for Ehud was dead.*” The eighty years of “rest” which the land enjoyed, and during the whole or most of which Ehud had ruled, now came to an end. But not causelessly. The “children of Israel again did (continued to do) evil in the sight of the Lord.” The interval of comparative piety is over, and the under-current of distrust and idolatry again resumes its influence. The spiritual fidelity of Israel is an occasional thing; the apostasy is the result of a permanent tendency, often checked, but ever recovering its sway. “The imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth” (Gen. viii. 21). “And God saw that . . . every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (*ibid.* vi. 5). Israel is described as “a people that provoked me to anger continually” (Isa. lxx. 3), &c. The best of men have been the first to confess their inherent depravity. At a religious meeting held in Florence, when the lowest and vilest of the city were present, the question was asked, “Is there one here who is not a sinner?” Only one man dared to say in bravado, “I am not!” but he was speedily silenced by the jeers and condemnation of the audience. The duty and wisdom of all is, therefore, not to question the existence of this tendency, but to guard against it. *Unbelief* is “the sin that doth so easily beset us” (Heb. xii. 1). Nor are we only the passive subjects of improving influences in the providence of God and the order of the world. We are to be “fellow-workers with God,” “to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, for (or because) it is God that worketh in us,” &c. (Phil. ii. 12). In dealing with our fellow-men or ourselves we must ever reckon upon this, the force of inborn corruption.

II. TEMPORARY MORAL INFLUENCES. That these have such weight at one time or another is a strong proof that salvation is not from within, neither, on the other hand, can it be wholly from without. We see here—1. *How much is involved sometimes in a personal influence.* Ehud, by the moral ascendancy he had acquired, is for the time the bulwark of his people’s faith. Such power is a precious gift. In measure like this it is the possession of the few. But every one has some moral influence, either for good or evil. “None of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself” (Rom. xiv. 7). It ought to be our care so to behave that our influence shall be increasingly for righteousness. But there are limits and imperfections in this. Although “the memory of the just smells sweet, and blossoms in the dust,” it is present influence with most of us that is most vividly impressive and practically effective. Still we can never gauge the extent of our influence. In God’s hands it may be multiplied indefinitely. In Christ we see the most glorious instance of personal, spiritual ascendancy. And his power shall never fail. 2. *The moral effect of a material advantage.* The presence of Sisera in “Harosheth of the Gentiles”—“probably *Haretheth*, a hill or mound at the south-eastern corner of the plain of Acca, close behind the hills that divide this plain from that of Jezreel, on the north side of the Kishon, yet so near the foot of Carmel as only to leave a passage for the river” (Thomson, ‘The Land and the Book,’ ch. xxix.)—with “nine hundred chariots of iron” overawed the Israelites (cf. ch. i. 19); and “twenty years he mightily oppressed” them. This force powerfully affected their imagination, and rendered them all but helpless. They forgot that God is able to break the chariots in pieces, and to make all their massive strength a disadvantage and a difficulty, as when the Egyptians laboured heavily in the Red Sea sand and waves; that the spirit that animates an army is greater than weapons or fortifications. But this cowardice of Israel just corresponds with the fear that so often unmans Christians of to-day, when confronted with great names, popular prejudices, and the shows and forces of the world. Nothing is easier than to over-estimate opposition of this sort. We have to learn in strenuous

contest that "greater is he that is in us than he that is in the world" (1 John iv. 4).

3. *Spiritual power vindicating itself amid external weakness.* Amidst the universal decay of religion there are ever a few who "have not bowed the knee unto Baal." God never entirely deserts even his unfaithful ones. Some are left from whom the new era may take a beginning. (1) *Jehovah does not leave his people without a witness.* As at other times of national misfortune a judge is raised up, "Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, she judged Israel at that time." Her authority is recognised, for "the children of Israel came up to her for judgment." A certain negative and secular respect is accorded to her. Divine ideas have no active power over the lives of the people; but Divine officials and institutions are still acknowledged in the general government and social life of Israel. She herself, however, is evidently full of the Spirit of Jehovah, and magnifies her office. The singularity of a woman exercising judicial functions has a powerful effect upon the national mind. Even the leading men and mighty soldiers obey her. (2) *This witness is an instance of strength in weakness.* The witness is only a woman. A sign this of the decay of the heroic spirit. But she initiates a bold and warlike policy. Evidently rising above the weakness of her sex, like Joan of Arc, she is determined to break the spell of the "nine hundred chariots of iron." The moral power she has obtained is seen in the obedience of Barak to her call and her instructions, the general answer of the nation to her summons, and the refusal of Barak to go against the enemy unless she accompanied them. So in the Messenian war ('Paus., iv. 16) "the soldiers fought bravely because their seers were present." We are not to understand Barak's insistency as cowardliness or perversity, but as a further tribute to the presence of God in his servant. The Ironsides fought bravely when they went into battle from praise and prayer. As the exigency is great, so the instrument of restoration is most insignificant and humiliating.—M.

Vers. 12—17.—*The battle of the brook Kishon, or material force versus spiritual.* The armies are a contrast in respect of resources, numbers, strategic position, prestige, and skilled leadership. In all these respects the army of Sisera had the advantage of that of Israel. But the Canaanite force was a mercenary one, probably of mixed nationality (hence term "Gentiles"), and enervated with luxury and dominance; whereas Israel was represented by men desperate through long suffering, familiar with the strategic possibilities of their country, and fired with new-found repentance, patriotism, and Divine inspiration. Instances of the impotence of inequalities like these when so compensated for on the spiritual side, to decide results, have been frequent in the history of the world, especially so in that of Israel. Here we see that—

1. **HE WHO DEPENDS UPON MATERIAL RESOURCES WILL BE SUBJECT**—1. *To sudden alarms.* It reads like a surprise. They were at ease, relying upon military strength and prestige, when the news of Barak's march upon Mount Tabor came to their ears. But how disproportionate the force Sisera so suddenly summons to arms! It is ignorance trying to cope with experience and skill; scanty equipment confronting all that a great and powerful nation could invent and provide for military defence and offence. Yet already it was a point in favour of Israel that it had aroused such apprehension for so slight a cause. The conscience of the wicked is never easy. The least sign of danger is sufficient to rouse it, and to occasion the most disproportionate exertions. 2. *To rash exposure of his resources.* "All the chariots of iron," the military power and glory of the oppressor, are at once called into exercise. This was unwise. A little more consideration would have suggested a better and more prudent disposal of his forces. It is evidently feeling, and not far-seeing military prescience, that dictates the pompous demonstration. How often do the oppressors of God's "little ones" drive their tyranny too far, and defeat their own end by over-eagerness and domineering imperiousness! The heart that God has inspired will look upon such things—the threats, &c.—as of little moment. 3. *To utter collapse.* The suddenness of the levy was adverse to its efficiency. Subject as Eastern troops are to panics, and difficult as it must have been for such cumbersome vehicles to deploy upon such varying levels, it was only necessary for the handful of Israelites to be led by a skilful general for them to produce confusion and dismay in the unwieldy

host. And when once the huge army began to yield, its own size and bulk would make its defeat the more disastrous. And *all* was risked at once. There was nothing more upon which, quickly enough, to fall back. So in the hour of the Church's peril and extremity God has found his opportunity. The Pope's bull is burnt, and the Reformation commences boldly and decidedly. "Fear not, I am with thee," has been the voice that has made the turning-point in many a career. All the pomp and show of the world is brought to bear upon the saint; he sees through it; a step, a stroke, and it melts like the "airy vision of a dream," and he is free!

II. HE WHO DEPENDS UPON GOD will—1. *See opportunity and hope against overwhelming odds.* "Up, for this is the day in which the Lord hath delivered Sisera into thine hand." So David—"The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine" (1 Sam. xvii. 37). So Gideon. This is the insight of faith. 2. *Make careful preparation.* "Trust in God, and keep your powder dry." The means, however inadequate, the best means at our disposal, must be employed. "God doesn't require my knowledge." "No more does he require your ignorance." It is a sign of respect to God, and a mark of thorough-going faith in him, that we make scrupulous use of the means he dictates. Often the "means of grace" are despised, to a Church's loss, to a Christian's loss, and sometimes destruction. "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength," &c. 3. *Confide in the Divine presence and promises.* Abraham is sure that "God will provide himself a lamb;" David sings, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, yet will I fear no evil;" and the Hebrew children were confident that the "God whom they served was able to deliver them." Faith as a grain of mustard seed "will remove mountains,"—M.

Vers. 17—22.—*Vide* ch. v. 24—27.—M.

Vers. 8, 9.—*Deborah and Barak.* I. THEY WHO UNDERTAKE TO ADVOCATE DIFFICULT TASKS SHOULD BE WILLING TO SHARE THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE EXECUTION OF THEM. Deborah urges Barak to fight; Barak will raise the standard only on condition that the prophetess will accompany him. There are prophets who sit with Deborah under the palm tree and advise noble deeds while they excuse themselves from facing the danger of achieving them. In the spiritual warfare of the Church we find critics who can see the defects of the work others are doing, and advise great improvements, yet who will never encounter the perils of the mission-field or the drudgery of more homely work. It is well to devise good measures, but it is better, like Deborah, to help in the execution of them.

II. IN THE BATTLE OF LIFE A GREAT VARIETY OF SERVICE IS REQUISITE FOR FINAL SUCCESS. Deborah cannot lead the army, but she can inspire it. Barak cannot prophesy, but he can fight. Thus Deborah cannot secure victory without Barak, nor Barak without Deborah. We are members one of another, and all the members have not the same office. There is work for the seer and work for the warrior. The world always needs its prophets and its heroes. The worker without the thinker will blunder into confusion; the thinker without the worker will fail for want of power to execute his designs. Brain work is at least as important as mechanical work. It is therefore foolish for practical men to despise the men of thought as mere theorists, and foolish for the thinkers to treat the active men of business with philosophical contempt. It is peculiarly woman's work to cheer and encourage those who are called to the dangerous tasks of life. Wives and mothers who dissuade their husbands and sons from their duty because it appears to be dangerous are indulging in a weak and foolish affection. The highest love will seek to encourage those who are loved in all that is great and noble.

III. IN THE SERVICE OF GOD THE FIRST REQUISITE FOR SUCCESS IS THE INSPIRING AID OF THE SPIRIT OF GOD. Deborah is a prophetess. She is gifted with the wisdom and enthusiasm of direct inspiration, and thus becomes the inspirer of Barak and his troops. Barak feels that if Deborah goes with him God's counsel and encouragement will be given him. Do we not trust too much to the mere machinery of our Church organisations in the execution of our work? One prophet in our midst is worth a thousand dull, earthly-minded men. The great need of the Church in her battle with

the evil of the world is the presence of the Spirit of God in light and power, to guide and to energise her dark and weak efforts. It is foolish to go up to our spiritual warfare without seeking the presence of God to accompany us (Exod. xxxiii. 15). If God go with us we shall need no special order of prophets, for then every soldier of Christ will be a prophet (Joel ii. 28).—A.

Ver. 21.—*Patriotic treachery.* I. OPPRESSION ROUSES THE DARKEST PASSIONS OF THE OPPRESSED. Jael's treacherous murder of Sisera did not occur in an age of peace and comfort, but after her nation had been terribly crushed by the Canaanite power. The worst evil of tyranny is not found in the mere distress which it brings on those who suffer from it, but in the bad passions which it provokes. The oppressed are degraded *morally*; they grow revengeful; unequal to open resistance, they become treacherous; misery blinds them to the claims of humanity. Slaves are too often cruel and treacherous. This fact, instead of excusing slavery, is its heaviest condemnation.

II. CRUELTY MAY EXPECT TO BE REWARDED WITH TREACHERY. Sisera was no innocent soldier falling in the discharge of loyal service to his country. He had "mightily oppressed the children of Israel." Harshness may appear to silence all opposition, but it really provokes the most dangerous enmity—secret and treacherous enmity. Sisera meets with a just doom. There is something cowardly in brutal oppression; it is fitting that the man who descended to practise it should not fall in honourable warfare, but meet his miserable fate at the hands of a deceitful woman.

III. THE GUILT OF A CRIME MUST BE MEASURED BY THE MOTIVE WHICH INSTIGATED IT. A cold-blooded crime committed for low ends of personal profit is far more wicked than the same deed done in the heat of provoked passion. The act which is committed for the good of others is *less* wicked than that which is entirely selfish in its motives. The motive of Jael was patriotic. She anticipated no danger to herself from Sisera, but she thought to rid her country of a great and cruel enemy. So far she was brave and noble.

IV. THE UTILITY OF THE END WILL NEVER EXCUSE THE WICKEDNESS OF THE MEANS EMPLOYED TO SECURE IT. Jael was no vulgar murderess. Her patriotic motive mitigated the guilt of her crime, but it did not destroy that guilt. She was guilty of a breach of the sacred rights of hospitality. Did she meditate murder when she welcomed Sisera into her tent? Possibly not. It may be that the sight of the sleeping man suggested the temptation to an easy way of delivering her nation from a great enemy. If so, her treachery was so much the less guilty. But the very warmth of her ostentatious hospitality offered to such a man as Sisera suggests only too forcibly that she meant treachery from the first. That grim scene—the weary soldier trusting himself in the hands of the murderous woman, while she lavishes her hospitality on him with fearful schemes working in her brain—is surely no picture of womanly glory, in whatever age we set it, with whatever provocations we mitigate its dark horror. Jael is plainly guilty of a gross breach of trust. We must not shut our eyes to her criminality because she did a deed on the side of the Jews which we should have condemned with loathing if it had been committed by a less enlightened, heathen, Canaanite woman. Reverence for the teaching of Scripture does not require us to excuse the faults of the Jews.—(Jael the Kenite was practically a Jewess.) It is most degrading to the conscience to read the dark pages of Hebrew history with the understanding that we must condemn nothing done by an Israelite. It is also false to the intentions of Scripture. In the Bible we see the failings of good men and the personal wickedness of some who took their stand on the right side. The merit of their cause does not destroy the guilt of their individual conduct. Deceit and cruelty have sometimes been practised in the interests of Christianity, of liberty, of humanity; but the only service God will accept must be fair, and true, and pure.—A.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER V.

Ver. 1.—**Then sang Deborah, &c.** The ode which follows was doubtless the composition of Deborah the prophetess, and was sung by her (as the gender of the Hebrew verb indicates), assisted by Barak, who perhaps sang the antistrophe (cf. Exod. xv. 1, 21). It is a song of wonderful beauty and lyric power, somewhat difficult, as all Hebrew poetry is.

Ver. 2.—Her first feeling was one of patriotic joy that her countrymen had been roused to the venture of war, and of gratitude to God that it was so. "For the bold leading of the leaders of Israel, for the willing following of the people, praise ye the Lord."

Ver. 3.—Her song was worthy to be listened to by kings and princes. She calls their attention to the tale she had to tell of the great acts of the Lord.

Vers. 4, 5.—The recent victory recalled the glories of those days when God brought up Israel from Egypt into Canaan. She specifies the march from Seir or Hor, and the day when Mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, and the whole mount quaked greatly.

Ver. 6.—From what misery God had saved the people! In the days of her predecessor Shamgar, when the Philistines overran the country, when Heber the Kenite still dwelt in the south of Judah, all traffic ceased in the land. The caravans were stopped, and travellers slunk into the by-ways.

Ver. 7.—Instead of **The inhabitants of the villages ceased**, some render *the leaders ceased*. Till Deborah arose and stirred up Barak, there was no one to put himself at the head of the people.

Ver. 8.—The cause of this misery was not far to seek; it was the idolatry of the people which provoked God to anger. Then their enemies were let loose upon them, and they dared make no resistance.

Ver. 9.—What a contrast with that faint-hearted submission was the recent triumphant rising! Exultation and thanksgiving for the devotion of the people break out again, as in ver. 2.

Ver. 10.—She appeals to the nobles who ride on white (or roan) asses, and sit on rich saddle-cloths (not *sit in judgment*), and to the people who walk by the way, alike to speak of the great deliverance.

Ver. 11.—A very difficult verse, and very variously rendered. For *archers* some give the interpretation *dividers*, i. e. **MENSHARING THE BOOTY THEY HAVE TAKEN**; or, **SINGING IN ALTERNATE VERSES**. For *they that are delivered* from, some render *far away* from. Others again take the preposition *from* in

the not uncommon sense of *more than*, meaning here *louder than*. The chief different senses which emerge are—(1) that of the A. V.: "Those that can now draw water from the wells without being molested by the hostile archers shall sing praises to God in the very spots where they were wont to be attacked." (2) "Far from the noise and tumult of those that divide the spoil among the water-troughs, there shall they sing," &c. (3) "With a louder voice than that of the *shepherds* who sing among the water-troughs (while they are watering their flocks), there shall they rehearse," &c. Or, (4) combining (2) and (3), "With a voice louder (and more exultant) than that of those who divide the spoil, there shall they rehearse," &c. **The inhabitants of his villages**. Render *his leaders*, as in ver. 7. **Then shall the people . . . go down to the gates of the cities for judgment, or to the bazaars, as in old times, without fear of their enemies.**

Ver. 12.—**Awake, &c.** She seems to go back in thought to the moment when she received the Divine call to her mission of deliverance, and executed it by the voice of her stirring prophecies. Then she lashed her soul into action, and roused Barak from his lethargy by the promise of spoil and victory.

Ver. 13.—Then he gave dominion to a mere remnant of Israel over the powerful among the people of Canaan, the Lord gave me dominion over the mighty men of Jabin.

Ver. 14.—They who spring (whose root is) from Ephraim *went* against Amalek, following thee, O Benjamin, with thy people; from Manasseh (Machir, son of Manasseh, Gen. i. 23) came down governors (literally, *lawgivers*: cf. ver. 9), and out of Zebulun they that handle the bâton of the commander, i. e. the military chiefs.

Ver. 15.—**He was sent on foot into the valley.** It was a mark of extraordinary valour that he rushed down from Mount Tabor on foot against the 900 iron chariots in the plain (ch. iv. 14). **For the divisions, &c.** Or, *among the water-brooks*, i. e. the Reubenites, dwelling amidst their flocks among the water-brooks, were much perplexed with doubts whether they should stay still or join their countrymen.

Ver. 17.—**In ships.** The celebrated harbour of Joppa (Jonah i. 3), now Jaffa, was in the tribe of Dan. **His breaches.** The creeks and bays where they kept their fishing-boats.

Ver. 19.—**The kings came and fought** (cf. Josh. xi. 1, 2, 5). **They took no gain of money.** These words may mean, (1) they did not stop to plunder, they were intent

only upon slaughter; or, (2) they took no ransom for their enemies' lives; or, (3) they got nothing by their fighting, for they were all killed themselves.

Ver. 20.—According to Josephus, a great storm in the face of the Canaanites led to their utter discomfiture, and also swelled the Kishon to overflow its banks.

Ver. 21.—**Ancient.** The word so rendered is only found here. *The brook of ancient days*, or things, probably means the brook celebrated from of old by the warlike deeds done on its banks.

Ver. 22.—**Their mighty ones.** Applied to bulls, Ps. xxii. 12, &c.; and to horses (A. V., *his strong ones*), Jer. viii. 16; *his strong horses*, Jer. xlvii. 3.

Ver. 23.—**Meroz**, in the time of Jerome *Merrus*, a village otherwise unknown, twelve miles from Samaria. **The mighty.** Not the same word as that so rendered in ver. 22, but that usually rendered *a mighty man*, or *a man of war*.

Ver. 24.—**Blessed above women, &c.** With the selfish indifference of the men of Meroz she contrasts the valorous enthusiasm

of Jael the Kenite, and blesses her for it as emphatically as she curses the inhabitants of Meroz.

Ver. 25.—**A lordly dish.** A dish fit for princes; perhaps one reserved for the most illustrious guests.

Ver. 26.—**With the hammer.** These words are not in the Hebrew, and should be omitted. *She smote* (not *smote off*), *yea, she wounded* (Psalm lxxviii. 21); *she pierced through his temples*.

Ver. 30.—**Sped, i. e.** come across some booty. **For the necks of them that take the spoil.** Literally, *for the necks of spoil*. It is a difficult and obscure expression. *The spoil* may mean the camels, horses, or mules taken from the enemy, and the articles described may mean the housings and trappings for their necks. Or *the necks of spoil* might mean the necks of the beasts of burden laden with spoil.

Ver. 31.—**A fine application of the whole subject!** Each such victory was a foretaste of the final victory over sin and death, and of the glory of the redeemed Church.

HOMILETICS.

This splendid ode, so full of poetic fire and vivid dramatic effect, with its startling contrasts, its picturesque descriptions, its glowing eulogiums, its burning patriotism, its striking characters thrown into high relief by the stroke or two of genius, its passion and its pathos, is not deficient in ethos. We will single out two or three ethical lessons from their surroundings.

I. **SELF-SACRIFICE FOR THE GOOD OF OTHERS.** The ninth verse is an awakening call to voluntary sacrifice on the altar of the public good. While men in general are hanging back from exertion and danger in sloth or timidity, unwilling to run any risk, or to make any effort, there are those who, with high-minded zeal for their country's or their Church's weal, burst asunder the restraining bonds of selfishness, and, with their life in their hands, offer themselves willingly for the common cause. Deborah's burst of generous admiration toward those who did so in her time is a stirring call to us to imitate their example. But let us not imagine that such self-sacrifice is confined to extraordinary occasions, or can be executed only on the platform of great emergencies. Unselfish efforts for the good of others find room for their exercise in the common round of every-day life. He who works when he is weary, who overcomes his natural shyness or timidity, who lays aside his own schemes or tastes and takes up work which is distasteful to him, who risks losses in money, in consideration, in convenience, in comfort, in ease, in leisure, that he may do something which he believes will be useful to others, is treading in the steps of these "willing governors," and deserves like them the warm approval of all generous hearts.

II. **WORLDLY HINDRANCES.** But we may see in the examples of Reuben and Gad what are the hindrances to such self-sacrificing work. There is a counter-call to the call of duty and of love, and that call is too a louder and a more persuasive one—the call of gain and worldly interest. When Deborah's message came to the Reubenites and Gileadites, and the blast of Barak's trumpet sounded in their ears, calling them to the help of the Lord against the mighty, the bleatings of their flocks and the lowing of their herds among the rich pastures of Jazer and Gilead seemed to tell them a different tale (see Numb. xxxii.). How could they leave those peaceful pastures, and exchange them for the battle-field? Jabin's iron chariots were nothing to them. What would become of their flocks and herds while they were far

away? As their eyes ran through the sheep-folds, and they reckoned up in thought the wealth which they contained; as they thought of the lambing, and the sheep-shearing, and the sheep-market, and told the increase which they might expect, they seemed tied to those sheep-folds by bonds which could not be broken, and by a spell which could not be loosed. After a few doubts and hesitations they abode among the folds, and left their brothers across the Jordan to fight by themselves. And so it was with Dan and Asher. The movements of Sisera had not interfered with the trade of Joppa, or the fishing-boats of the sea-coast. The ships of Tarshish were coming and going as of old, laden with merchandise from all parts of the world; some touching there on their way to Tyre, others supplying the markets of Palestine with wrought iron, and cassia, and sweet calamus. Already perhaps the silver and iron, the tin and the lead, brought by the ships of Tarshish from the Cassiterides, found their way to the fairs of Joppa; and the wheat of Minnith, and the oil and honey and pastry (Hebrew, *pannag*) of Judah, went out through its harbour to Tyre and Sidon (Ezek. xxvii. 12, 17, 19). And the men of Dan were all busy by that sea-side. Lading and unlading the ships, carrying the bales of merchandise on their strong backs, giving and receiving orders, piloting the foreign ships into harbour, plying to and fro as they handled the oar, stopping the leaks or mending the sails of ships that had come out of rough waters—there was no end of business to be done, and of money to be made. Why leave these peaceful gains and rush inland to perish by the sword? Surely they might be excused if they remained in ships, and continued on the sea-shore, enriching their country by their industry, while they left it to others to jeopard their lives in the high places of the field. And they did so; and in doing so have left us an instructive warning as to the hindrances which the world continually places in the way of high-minded action and generous self-sacrifice. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world," if you would be free to serve either God or man, is the precept that settles upon the thoughts as we consider the gaps in the muster-roll of Israel at the battle by the waters of Megiddo.

III. THE ENMITY OF NEUTRALITY. But ver. 23 reads us a yet sterner lesson. There are occasions when not to act for God is to act against God. There are occasions when a man cannot be neutral. When the Lord calls for help against the mighty, he that withholds that help is cursed. By so doing he is helping the enemies of God, and among the enemies of God he will fall. Here was Meroz in the very thick of the fight. Ephraim and Benjamin, Issachar and Manasseh, Zebulun and Naphtali, were pouring out their thousands to defend their altars and their homes. The honour of God, the freedom of God's people, the cause of truth against heathen error, the kingdom of God against the tyranny of Satan, were trembling in the balance. A few hundreds more or less might turn the scale. All Israel was awake and alive to the noble task before them. There was music in the tramp of the thousands of devoted men marching to the war which might have aroused the dullest soul and kindled the faintest spirit. It did not move the men of Meroz; they hung back in sullen indifference; they skulked behind their walls. No zeal for the glory of God, no sympathy with their brethren, could pierce through their heartless selfishness. As the angel of the Lord looked out from the windows of heaven, he saw their cowardice, he marked their back-drawing, he pronounced them cursed. There are times, our own times are such, when the enemies of the cross of Christ are unusually active against the truth. At such times Satan musters all his forces, and would fain overthrow the Church of God. Infidelity stalks through the land. The leaders of sceptical opinion join hand in hand. Science and literature, wit and intellect, the press and the platform, fashion and numbers, are pressed into the service, to cast discredit upon the everlasting gospel of the grace of God. At such a time to be neutral and indifferent is to be a traitor to the Lord Jesus Christ. At such a time he calls to his help against the mighty all who believe in him, who love him, and who hope in his salvation. "Who is on the Lord's side, who?" is his appeal to his redeemed. Let no believer hold back from giving what help is in his power: the help of word and deed; the help of bold confession and of unflinching countenance; the help of tongue and pen; the help, if need be, of suffering and of martyrdom; the help of a devoted life, and of a holy

Christian walk, in all humility, and purity, and faith, knowing whom he has believed, and fully assured that faith will be crowned with victory.

IV. THE END OF THE UNGODLY (ver. 31). All the enemies of the Lord will surely perish. The day is not far off which will mark the difference between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not. The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ; and then they that love him shall be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might. The righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father, and they who confessed Christ before men will be confessed of him before the angels of God. Such are the fuller prophecies of the New Testament, confirming the obscurer prophecies of the Old, and encouraging us to hold on our faith without wavering, in the certainty of the great reward.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 2.—*Self-sacrifice and its Inspirer*. There are two other renderings of this verse, viz., "That in Israel wildly waved the hair in the people's self-devotion,—praise God" (Cassel); and, "For the leading of the leaders in Israel, for the free self-offering of the people, praise Jehovah" (Stanley, after LXX.). It is immaterial which of these we prefer; the chief thought is evidently that which appears in all. It is the key-note of this heroic song, as it is the essence of heroism and true religion always—self-sacrifice to God.

I. THE SPIRIT IN WHICH GREAT DEEDS ARE WROUGHT. The outburst has its source in Divine patriotism or religious enthusiasm. A consciousness of a representative character and destiny animates the Israelites. Religious devotion binds them into complete communion. Private aims and interests are forgotten. 1. *It is this spirit which rescues the war of deliverance from objections to war simply as such*. As an act of self-devotion it was a truly devout, and therefore religiously legitimate, war. No hope of personal gain animates the host of Israel. It is patriotism in its noblest form. These soldiers are all volunteers; they obey a Divine voice. How many wars would cease were such feelings consulted! The saints' contest with evil should be conducted from a like principle. We should know what "manner of spirit" we are of. 2. *It was this spirit which made so effectual the struggle in which they were engaged*. They were desperate, devoted men. No half-measure would be tolerated. Having counted the cost, they were willing to carry it on *à outrance*. God's battle with error and wickedness has suffered because of the half-heartedness of those who wage it. 3. *It was this spirit which conferred upon the deed its æsthetic beauty and epic grandeur*. It is a fine question to determine what that is that gives the essential character to the noble, chivalrous, and religious enthusiasms of men. A careful survey of any considerable number of them will show that not only *unselfishness*, but *self-sacrifice*, is their fundamental principle. Selfish aims, or the impulse of self-aggrandisement, vitiates the deed, however externally magnificent; and *vice versa*, the magnanimous forgetfulness of self, the conscious foregoing of personal ends and aims, will give nobility and piety even to works externally indifferent or apparently ignoble. The sentiment of a deed is its true character. Here it assumes a dignity and glory that command the admiration of the poet and the artist. It is part of the excellence of noble deeds to inspire. There is nothing so inspiring as self-devotion. But this is the vital breath of all true religion. Religious enthusiasm is contagious. The pious hero cannot long remain alone. True worship is the praise of the cross, where the power of darkness sustained its signal, final defeat. "By the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." If we are truly religious our lives also will blossom forth in acts that poets might sing and orators extol.

II. THE INSPIRER OF GREAT DEEDS. That they are not a spontaneous outgrowth of our nature is the general confession of those who have wrought them. The object of Israel's admiration and obedience was Jehovah. It was in the inspiration derived from him the deliverance was wrought. God in Christ, as embodying the highest excellency in sympathetic relation with ourselves, is an even more powerful stimulus to heroism and piety. "For Christ's sake" is a formula that covers a vast proportion

of "whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, and pure, and lovely, and of good report," in the world's history.—M.

Vers. 6, 7.—*National ruin and the true deliverer.* The mighty deed of Shamgar did not avail to reduce the interior of Israel to a state of order and security. Whoever Jael (the Helper) may have been, whether Ehud, Shamgar, or some other hero, even he was unable to restore confidence to the dwellers in the country, or to render communication between the towns and villages easy and secure. The description here reminds one of Germany in the tenth century, or Sicily and Greece in our own times. A strong hand and a central government are required in order to inspire confidence and to render the conditions of life uniform and reliable. A country may be great in military strength, and yet, socially and politically, at a standstill because of the absence of due internal administration, of public institutions, and zeal for the public welfare. We have here—

I. A VIVID PICTURE OF NATIONAL DECAY. 1. *The means of inter-communication were rendered useless.* "The highways were deserted." Main thoroughfares have ever been requisite for the proper inter-communication of the different parts and towns in a country. They are therefore one of the first means employed for opening up internal resources and developing commerce and civilisation. All really great governments have distinguished themselves in road-making; as, for instance, the Incas of Peru, the Chinese, and the Romans. It was the boast of the Roman writer that the circuit of the empire could be made through Europe, Asia, and Africa, without risk to life or property, by a private traveller. The sight of deserted highways suggests the collapse of commerce and social intercourse. It is more striking than the complete absence of roads would be. And highways that continued in disuse would soon get out of repair and be rendered impassable. In the present day a similar state of things prevails over a large part of Palestine and Asia Minor. Travellers make their journeys by night, and avoid the villages and public roads. The wandering Arab brings the desert with him wherever he goes. 2. *The country districts depopulated.* This would rapidly reduce the country to barrenness, and render the support of the nation more precarious. A mere tithe of the population could then be supported, and the nation would be kept in a state of weakness.

II. THE SECRET OF NATIONAL REGENERATION. Deborah was a mother in Israel. The military hero played his part, but failed of highest success. It was for her, by wise and statesmanlike measures, internal administration, and a strong central government, to bring to the people's doors the fruits of military success. She fostered a national spirit, encouraged a respect for law, and rendered it as safe to dwell in the country as within the walled city. The continuous policy of Deborah achieved the reconstitution of the land and its freedom from internal lawlessness.—M.

Ver. 8.—*The peril of national irreligion.* The conscience of Israel is here addressed. The coincidence of new idolatries with "war in the gates" was strikingly suggestive. It could not be accidental. There was nothing in which Israel had had more continued experience than in the connection of idolatry with national weakness and misery.

I. DECLINE COMMENCES WITH THE FIRST DEPARTURE FROM THE WORSHIP OF JEHOVAH. It was as they trusted in Jehovah and acquainted themselves with him that they were able to drive out their enemies. The weakening of this religious principle undermined the moral character and strengthened the force of sensuous influences. It is only as the soul anchors itself on the Eternal that it is able rightly to regard the outward and temporary affairs of life.

II. THE ADOPTION OF OTHER GODS IS PUNISHED AS A CULMINATING AFFRONT. In this we see not so much the indirect results of idolatrous practice as the immediate chastisement of Jehovah's own hand. The apostasy is deliberate; punishment must be proportionately stern and extreme. Those who have known his character and will, and yet deliberately despise them, deserve the more condign punishment. We see this principle at work in many a life. There are sins which seem to invite a terrible vengeance. Do we provoke God's anger? Let us remember that he can be

a consuming fire. Deliberate rejection of God is a direct invitation and challenge to his wrath.

III. THE FINAL RESULT OF IDOLATRY IS EFFEMINACY AND ABJECT HELPLESSNESS. This is proved by an appeal to history. The Israelites had an instance of it in their own experience. There may have been weapons in Israel, but the idol worshipper had lost the courage to wield them. Idolatry, as a degraded conception of God, degrades its votaries. It has ever been linked with licentiousness and vice. The conscience is gradually destroyed, and with it all moral strength disappears.—M.

Vers. 10, 11.—*Testimony and thanksgiving the duty of the redeemed.* The classes here addressed are representative of the entire nation—nobles, judges or elders, and common people. The deliverance affected all, and those specially benefited are called out. The hand of God is to be publicly acknowledged and celebrated in song; and this was seemly and right. So it is the duty of the redeemed of Christ to rehearse his marvellous works and ways with them.

I. THIS OUGHT TO BE DONE SEVERALLY AND IN PARTICULAR. In the case of each there is some peculiarity. It will illustrate afresh God's manifold mercy. "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles."

II. IT OUGHT TO BE DONE PUBLICLY AND COLLECTIVELY. The national recognition of God is a most impressive and instructive spectacle. It becomes the more so if spontaneous, and not the result of legislative enactment or meaningless tradition.

III. THE REASONS FOR THIS ARE MANIFOLD. 1. *It is due to him.* The work of Christ is very great, involving vast effort and suffering. It is full of love and wisdom, adapted to our special need. And in all the work of redemption no credit is to be taken to ourselves; the merit is wholly his. "By the grace of God I am what I am." To withhold the praise is therefore worse than theft. 2. *It is the highest and most blessed exercise of the religious nature.* Man was born "to glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever." In so doing his nature attains its highest end and complete spiritual development. The harmony of praise and prayer has its reflex influence upon the utterer, and as God in Christ is the most glorious object of adoration, the heart is expanded, uplifted, strengthened, and purified. There is nothing we are so liable to as forgetting God's mercies, and our dependence upon them; and therefore it is well to rehearse them. 3. *It is a benefit to others.* The world is full of misconceptions and low thoughts of God, and indifference towards the Divine. By such rehearsals the true character of God is vindicated. Men are taught to trace all blessings to their real Author. Doubters, &c. are counselled and directed towards clear, healthy, and health-giving ideas of God. Thus the gospel of the grace of God is preached most effectively. Others catch the contagion. Are we silent? What is the cause? Ingratitude; or it may be we are strangers to the grace of God. Let us yield ourselves to it now. Perhaps we too shall sing in a higher realm "unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood."—M.

Vers. 14—23.—*National defence a common responsibility.* We have here an interesting glimpse of the behaviour of the various tribes in the war of freedom. Not all were summoned to battle; but of these only two answered to the call.

I. WHO ARE SUMMONED TO THE GREAT WAR? All the tribes whose interests were threatened in the first place; but the others might have come from a feeling of brotherhood. Through Christ the solidarity of the race is revealed. We have nearer and further claims, a more and a less imperative call, yet the interest of each is involved in that of the whole. The debt we all owe to Christ binds us henceforth "not to live to ourselves." "Am I my brother's keeper?"

II. WHO RESPOND? Two tribes and a friendly alien. This showed a lack of public spirit, and of a true national conception. The Captain of our salvation calls. Who are willing? "Will ye also go away?" A few, all over. In every Church one or two have to bear the burden and heat of the day. Is this right?

III. THE EXCUSES AND OCCUPATIONS OF THOSE WHO HOLD BACK. Very picturesque is the description—not a little satirical. How sorry the figure cut by those who tarry at home when the battle rages! the excuses of those who were asked to follow Christ!

IV. STRICT ACCOUNT WILL BE TAKEN OF THE CONDUCT OF EACH, AND THE REWARD WILL BE GIVEN ACCORDINGLY. The sharp eye of the prophetess scanned the host she accompanied. To each is apportioned the praise or blame. *God sees the heart.*—M.

Ver. 20.—*The hopelessness of opposition to God.* This verse is variously interpreted as an astrological allusion—as descriptive of a thunder-storm, accompanied by wind, hail, and floods, producing confusion (Josephus); or as suggestive of the delay which lost Sisera the opportunity. The explanation of Berthau, referring it to the *Divine intervention*, appears more reasonable and spiritually sufficient. All through the mind of the prophetess dwells upon God as the Helper and Avenger. But there is room for an intermediate idea. The stars are symbols of an unvarying law and universal destiny. Generalise upon the great contest between right and wrong. The combatants are not only men; the whole universe is involved. Angels join in the fray. God himself is against the sinner. The latter must be vanquished.

I. THE ULTIMATE CHARACTER OF THE CONTEST OF THE WICKED WITH THE RIGHTEOUS. An accidental circumstance may excuse it; a temporary character may be assumed by it. We may not divine the whole scope and drift of the quarrel. Truth may not be wholly on one side or the other. Sometimes a prophetic insight assures us that we are with God, or against him. Ultimately the question is one of right and wrong.

II. THE COMBATANTS INVOLVED. Not human opponents merely; the question too large for this. The laws of the universe; the angels of God; destiny; God himself—visibly contending in the person of his Son, invisibly in the councils of eternity.

III. THE CERTAINTY OF THE ISSUE.—M.

Ver. 23.—*The curse of Meroz.* The site of this city or district not verified. A singularity about the people's conduct. Others had withheld as well as they; but they had either (1) special reasons for fidelity, or (2) aggravating circumstances connected with their inaction. The consequence was that they inherited the primacy of the curse. Was it that the ban destroyed the very name and memory of the place from the face of the earth? It became a "*locus classicus*" in Talmudic expositions of the ban against persons and things" (Cassel).

I. THERE ARE CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH INDIFFERENCE AND INACTION WITH RESPECT TO THE CAUSE OF GOD IN THE WORLD CONSTITUTE A FEARFUL CRIME. The nation they belonged to represented for them the kingdom of God. It was suffering from grievous servitude. When the short, desperate struggle for freedom took place, everything might depend upon the faithfulness of those situated as they were. They hung back, or co-operated with the enemy. This was a sin against the Divine brotherhood and the cause of God. Indifference at any time is wicked; but the habit may some time or other suddenly reveal itself in tremendous heinousness. Special efforts to promote the kingdom of Christ, to prevent the dying out of religious institutions or movements, critical periods in individual lives, ought to call forth our most generous and self-denying aid. It might just be *our* help that was needed in order to success; our indifference that sealed the fate of a soul turning towards God, or a religious movement upon which depended important results.

II. GREATER RESPONSIBILITIES AND PRIVILEGES ENTAIL A GREATER CURSE UPON UNFAITHFULNESS. Terrible vengeance was taken upon the erring city. Of how much greater punishment shall Christian apostasy be thought worthy? (Heb. x. 28—30). We sin against greater light. How great is our debt to grace! What issues depend upon our being found faithful! Remember Christ's warnings (Matt. xi. 23; xviii. 6; xxiii. 37).—M.

Ver. 24.—*The conduct of Jael.* A moral perplexity to modern times. This arises from the advance, amounting almost to a revolution, in the spiritual sentiment of the world. It is from the higher platform of the New Testament that we see the deed in its true relations and proportions.

I. ITS JUSTIFICATION. There are several grounds, upon any or all of which the deed may be defended. 1. *That of a relative and imperfect morality.* Morality in that age was not perfectly revealed or realised. With increasing light of revelation and spiritual experience come new moral levels and tests. A thing may be

comparatively or relatively right which is not absolutely so. The fact that we condemn the action is not due to our superior natural light, but simply to the teachings of Christianity, the outgrowth and perfecting of the crude morality of the Old Testament. 2. *On the principle that the obligation to tell the truth depends upon the existence of a normal and friendly relation between men; the permission to kill carrying with it that of dissimulation* (Mozley). 3. *Because Jael followed as a mere instrument the impulse of the Absolute.* Is it not credible that persons may be moved by a superior reason to do things justifiable from the standpoint of that superior reason, but which, if they fully realised what they were doing, would be utterly unlawful for them to do?

II. ITS BEARINGS UPON INSPIRATION, &c. OF HOLY SCRIPTURE. The inspiration of Scripture cannot be affected by the inspired sanction of such a deed. Inspiration does not necessarily involve a knowledge of the "whole counsel of God." It has its degrees, and is reliable so far as it goes. A merely human production would have avoided such apparent self-contradictions. That there are moral mysteries and difficulties in the Bible, which are nevertheless seen to have possible solutions beyond the immediate knowledge of man, is a strong presumption in favour of its being Divine.

III. HOW FAR IS Jael AN EXAMPLE TO BE IMITATED? In no wise. This is an exceptional case, all of whose circumstances must be taken into account. She is, like many whom a special destiny seems to isolate from their fellows, almost to be pitied, save for the thought that she acted as the servant of God. The instincts by which we condemn her deed are evidently of God, and must therefore be followed.—M.

Ver. 31.—*The sunlike life.* Cf. Prov. iv. 18. A beautiful simile. Many points of resemblance between the course and nature of the sun and the character and life of the Christian.

I. PROGRESS. *Steady.* By gradual, regularly increasing advance. The hours and days and years can be measured by it. We can calculate upon it. *Continual.* Not by fits and starts. Ever forward, even when not seen. *Culminating.* Noon is splendour and strength; sunset is fulfilment.

II. ILLUMINATION. In the Christian life nothing need be concealed. We are "children of the light, and of the day." Openness, honesty, actions of simplicity and good report. Knowledge is light, and it is by knowing the Eternal that we live. The spiritual are the light of the world. Christ is so *par excellence*; but all Christians shine with his brightness, and exhibit his character. We are so to live as that others can take knowledge of us that we have been with Jesus, and that they may follow us as we follow him. The figure also suggests that Christians may become clear, and bright, and free from darkness as light itself is. Spiritual illumination is not ever a borrowing from without. We may have light and life in ourselves. The sun is independent of circumstances, and shines on even when half the world is dark. It is also a figure for vindication and triumph. The day shall declare how much! The glory and beauty of the spiritual man shall then be revealed.—M.

Ver. 7.—*A mother in Israel.* The position and character of Deborah and her mission to Israel are suggestive of the Scriptural teaching concerning women and their work.

I. GOD RAISED UP A WOMAN FOR THE DELIVERANCE OF HIS PEOPLE. Deborah appears in the line of deliverers. The others are all fighting men. In the present instance a warrior, Barak, is associated with the prophetess; yet it is not he, but the woman, Deborah, who secured victory, for she tells us that the hamlets were deserted *until* she arose. The Bible assigns great honour and high privileges to women. In Jewish history they are often prominent and famous for noble services. Women were among the most honoured of the disciples of Christ. In spite of the narrow views regarding the rightful position of women with which St. Paul is credited, that great apostle was ready to recognise the valuable work of women in the Church (Phil. iv. 3). Women have peculiar powers for such work as requires sympathy and the gentleness which is at the root of true greatness (Ps. xlviii. 35). And many

women who are not called to imitate the heroic career of Deborah may take example from the compassion of Pharaoh's daughter, the hospitality of Abigail, and the charity of Dorcas.

II. THE WOMAN CHOSEN FOR THE DELIVERANCE OF ISRAEL WAS A MOTHER. The peculiar virtue of celibacy is a late invention which finds no basis in the Bible. There marriage is honourable (Heb. xiii. 4), and to mothers a peculiar honour is given (1 Tim. ii. 15). The joys and cares of maternity deepen the nature of women and develop the noblest and most Divine of all affections—a mother's strong, tender, devoted love. A true mother will not have the less affection for others because her first duty is to her own children. She is no perfect mother, even, whose whole affection and care is confined to her family. With her maternal affection is little more than a form of selfishness, the offspring being regarded as an enlargement of the personality of the parent. The true mother is motherly in her nature, and shows her motherliness in all relations of life; so that to her friends, her nation, and the needy, her thought and care partake of the mother's fond, self-sacrificing devotion. Therefore patriotism is not antagonistic to maternal affection, but offers a field for its noblest efforts.

III. THOUGH A MOTHER IS CHOSEN FOR THE WORK OF DELIVERING ISRAEL, SHE IS NOT CALLED TO SACRIFICE ANY WOMANLY GRACE IN PERFORMING THE TASK. Deborah was no Amazon. Hers was not the fierce fighting of Barak. She was a prophetess. 1. Her mission was to *inspire and encourage*. This is one of woman's noblest works. Women are unfaithful when they check their sons or husbands in the performance of dangerous duties. 2. Her mission was also to *utter God's praises* after victory had been secured. Women, more sensitive than men, should be able to arouse songs of thanksgiving, while men may be slower to awake to the full feeling of gratitude. In leading the praises of the Church women have a truly womanly mission.—A.

Ver. 9.—*Self-dedication*. Deborah's heart turns in motherly affection to those rulers of Israel who have willingly offered themselves to the service of their God and their country. It should be the aim of the Christian to emulate such self-devotion in the cause of Christ and of humanity.

I. THE OFFERING WAS TO GOD AND THE COUNTRY. 1. *It was to God*. Though this fact is not expressly named here, as in the case of Jehoshaphat's captain, Amasiah (2 Chron. xvii. 16), it is plainly implied, inasmuch as the people had been incited by a Divine messenger and were living under a theocracy. God was the King, and the soldier's fidelity to his king was fidelity to God. Men devote themselves to business, pleasure, art, literature, science. The highest object of devotion is to live to God. This may be pursued through the necessary earthly occupations, elevating and consecrating them by making them part of God's service. 2. *The devotion was also to the country*. Patriotism is a Christian duty. But the Christian is called to care for the large human world. We are called upon to live for the good of others, to aim at increasing their happiness and spiritual welfare. This aim is not divergent from that of serving God. We render him service by working for the good of others according to his will, and so as to render him honour.

II. THE OFFERING OF THE GOVERNORS WAS OF THEMSELVES. God is not satisfied with our gifts; he asks for our hearts (Prov. xxiii. 26). The true preachers of God's will will say, "We seek not yours, but you" (2 Cor. xii. 14). No gifts will be acceptable to God until we have first given our own selves to him (2 Cor. viii. 5). The sacrifice of self-dedication, which was symbolised to the Jew in the whole burnt offering, is a sacrifice still looked for under the Christian dispensation, not as a propitiation for sin, but as a thank offering. This, and no less, constitutes our reasonable service (Rom. xii. 1). We offer ourselves to God when we render him the homage of our hearts in love, when we sacrifice our wills to his will in submission and obedience, when we make it the object of our life to please and serve and honour him. We cannot compensate for lack of personal devotion by payment, as in some countries the conscript can do in regard to military service. Our gifts will not take the place of our work. We cannot serve God by proxy. The work of the missionary or of any professional agent of the Church must not be regarded as a substitute for the work of the private Christian. God claims the personal service of all of us.

III. THE OFFERING WAS VOLUNTARY. Deborah rejoices in the fact that the governors offered themselves willingly. 1. *The only acceptable service of God must be willing service.* God leaves us free to accept or reject his service, he uses no violent compulsion to drive us into it. There is no conscription for recruiting the regiments of the kingdom of heaven; all soldiers in that glorious army are volunteers. This is important, because (1) only voluntary service can come from the heart,—God values devotion of the heart more than work of the hands,—and (2) only voluntary service will be vigorous and enthusiastic and inspired with the devotion which insures success. 2. *We have every motive to render this willing service.* We are free from compulsion, but we are not free from obligation. We are to blame if we do not freely offer ourselves, and if we persist in refusing it will go ill with us at the last. (1) *Duty* requires the service. The people were summoned by a Divine messenger. We are summoned by the preaching of the kingdom. They were living under the rule of God; God is our King and Lord. They were bound to defend their country in its need; we are bound by nature and Christianity to help our fellow-men in their distress and sin. (2) *Gratitude* makes the service one of love. The Jews had seen mighty Divine deliverances; we have the sacrifice of Christ for us and his love constraining us (2 Cor. v. 15).

In application of these truths it may be noticed that some are waiting to be called into the Church or for service. Such waiting is a mistake. Christ is waiting for us. He has called us; he expects our free self-dedication. Let us not wait to be sought or asked, but freely offer ourselves to his service.—A.

Ver. 14. — *Literary occupations.* Whether these men of Zebulun were poets, chroniclers, or only merchants' clerks, their occupation was distinctly different from that of their brethren, and the peculiar duties attaching to it may serve to illustrate those which belong to a corresponding class of men in our own day.

I. LITERATURE IS A FIELD OF HONOURABLE INDUSTRY. It is a foolish misnomer which characterises handicraftsmen as the only "working men." Men can and do work at least as hard with their brains as with their hands; and such work is not the most unworthy of honourable effort. We cannot make a greater mistake than to confine the epithet "manly" to the exercise of brute force, an exercise in which a Hercules would be out-matched by a gorilla. True manliness is the right development of all the noblest powers of a man, among which the intellectual must take a high place.

II. LITERATURE MAY BE MADE A SOURCE OF THE HIGHEST GOOD TO MANKIND. Writing is a means of expressing, preserving, and disseminating ideas. This means has been chosen by God for the promotion of religion, viz., in the Bible. Therefore it is foolish to despise literature as unpractical; it may be the most useful instrument for benefiting mankind. This should be remembered by those who have literary power, and should prevent them from wasting their talents on the selfish enjoyment of intellectual luxury. Literary ability is, like the gift of tongues, a Divine gift bestowed on men for the good of the whole world.

III. IN ORDER THAT LITERATURE MAY EFFECT THE GREATEST GOOD, IT MUST BE ENLISTED IN THE SERVICE OF GOD. They who "handle the pen of the writer" must be among those who "willingly offer themselves" to the service of the Lord. God claims our best for his work. Men who have literary gifts should understand that they are not at liberty to write simply for occupation, for amusement, for money, or for fame, but for the honour of God and the good of men. Such considerations should secure more conscientiousness in writing; the observance of the great literary duties of truthfulness, fairness, purity, and charity; and the pursuit of elevating themes.

IV. THEY WHO ARE CALLED TO LITERARY DUTIES MUST NOT FEEL THEMSELVES EXONERATED FROM MORE GENERAL OBLIGATIONS. The literary man must sometimes lay down the pen and draw the sword. The danger of sedentary and literary occupations is that they should lead to indolence and an unpractical habit of life. It will not do for any of us to live in the delicious seclusion of dream-land. There are stern tasks and serious burdens which all true men will have to encounter if the terrible realities of the world's wickedness and misery are to be faced as the claims of God and humanity demand of us. While the trumpet sounds to war it is treason for the men of Zebulun to linger behind in learned leisure; and while God calls his people to do

battle for him against the ignorance and sin of the world, there is no excuse for the most gifted, the most fastidious, or the most occupied to shirk their share of the dangers and toils of hard warfare.—A.

Ver. 16.—*Indolent indecision.* The men of Reuben who refused to obey the call to arms appear to have indulged at once in questioning criticism and in selfish inactivity, and thus they illustrate the close association of indolence and indecision. Indolence encourages indecision by checking the energy requisite for choice, and indecision encourages indolence by closing all doors of action. The situation of indolent indecision may be considered from the point of view of indolence and from that of indecision.

I. THE SITUATION REGARDED ON THE SIDE OF INDOLENCE. 1. *Private business* was one excuse for negligence of public duty. People often make their business an excuse for not undertaking the work Christ calls them to (Matt. xxii. 5). But this results either (1) from idleness, since more energy would make time for Christ's service, or (2) from selfishness, inasmuch as we have no right to devote our whole time to our private interests. 2. *Love of ease* led to negligence of public duty. It was less arduous to tend the flocks than to assemble for war. 3. *Love of peace* may have had the same effect. The Reubenites may have been peculiarly men of peace, while the Ephraimites were men of war. There are times, however, when the peaceful habit is sinful, and when we are only hiding our indolence under the cloak of peace, and when it is our duty to take up the cross, which is involved in facing the confusion and harshness of conflict. It is wrong to refuse to maintain the right and to rebuke falsehood and wickedness out of the love of peace. 4. *Pleasure* may have inclined to indolence. That was no time for dreaming pastoral idyls when the nation was in jeopardy and a Deborah was sounding the war-trumpet. Music and poetry, and the love of nature and art have their place among the innocent amenities of life; but when æstheticism becomes a religion, and the graces of life take the places of its duties, the harmless pleasures which allure us from stern tasks become positive sins. The wretchedness, the vice, the crime which darken the very atmosphere of Christendom leave none of us free to luxuriate in soft dreams of imaginary bliss, instead of doing our utmost to conquer these hideous monsters.

II. THE SITUATION REGARDED ON THE SIDE OF INDECISION. 1. Indecision is often the effect of directing intellectual energy to *negative criticism* rather than to practical contrivance. Criticism is most valuable in its place; but when it is carried to the point of fastidiousness it becomes nothing less than a fatal, paralysing influence. Reuben was divided in counsel, uncertain as to the best course to pursue, and therefore did nothing. So there are people who waste their energies in exposing the defects of all plans of action, and yet have not the inventiveness and strength to discover and pursue better plans. But it is better to work in an imperfect method than not to work at all. 2. Indecision can only be conquered by cultivating *strength of will and convictions of duty*. It is the will that decides. When the intellect is cultivated at the expense of the will, moral paralysis is the result. Strength of will can be best attained in its right form by the exercise of what will we already have under convictions of duty. We should remember that our chief mission in the world is not criticism, but work. God calls us to action, and even if we work imperfectly and often fail, he will be better pleased at our well-meant, though perhaps mistaken, efforts to do what we believe to be right than at the inactivity which refuses to do anything from fear of committing the smallest error.—A.

Ver. 23.—*The curse of Meroz.* I. THE CURSE WAS FOR INACTIVITY. Meroz had committed no offence, but is solely to blame for failing in action. Innocence of positive guilt is not enough to secure us from condemnation in the judgment of God. We shall be judged by what we have left undone as well as by what we have done. In Christ's vision of judgment, those who are made to stand on the left of the throne and are then condemned to outer darkness are not offenders against the moral law, but simply persons who have neglected the active duties of charity (Matt. xxv. 45). It is a very common error for people to suppose that they are blameless so long as they keep themselves unspotted from the world, forgetting that the first duty of

religion is the energetic exercise of charity (James i. 27). Better to have some faults and much useful service than to be faultless and useless. The soldier who returns from war with scarred face and stained garments is nobler than he who fears to enter the battle lest he shall soil his raiment or mar his countenance.

II. THE CURSE WAS FOR INACTIVITY IN REGARD TO PUBLIC DUTY. Meroz was unpatriotic. Possibly the men on whom the curse fell were diligent farmers and kind and careful parents. But they neglected their duty to their country. We must beware of the narrowness of the parochial mind. The congregation which studies its own edification alone, and has no care for the evangelising of the nation and for mission work among the heathen, brings itself under the curse of Meroz. In the faithful payment of taxes, in the conscientious use of the franchise, in the right use of influence in public matters men have a constant call to patriotic duty. But we have all larger duties to men as men, and so long as misery, ignorance, and wickedness prevail none of us can escape condemnation until we have done our part to remove those evils.

III. THE CURSE WAS FOR INACTIVITY IN A TIME OF WAR. 1. It was the time of the nation's *greatest need and danger* when Meroz was discovered to be indolently unpatriotic. Great emergencies reveal the evil which has existed unobserved in quieter times. If we are not faithful in that which is least we shall be proved unfaithful in that which is greatest. The evil which may be fatal to our nation in times of danger may be lurking among us unseen in these more quiet times. Therefore the shameful failings of those who are held up to the reprobation of history may be no worse than the mean selfishness which pervades the lives of multitudes who meet with no blame, simply because the day of trial has not yet made their character apparent to the world. 2. The danger in which the unfaithfulness of Meroz was revealed brought a call to *aggressive action*. Meroz was found wanting in a time of war. We are called to resist evil. If we permit others to be oppressed by injustice and cruelty when we might deliver them by any sacrifice and toil of our own, we bring ourselves under the curse of Meroz. Christianity is aggressive. It is the duty of Christians not merely to promote purity, and charity, and truth, &c., but to expose and attack the vices and wrongs of the world.—A.

Ver. 31.—*The triumph of the Church.* The triumph of Israel after the overthrow of the Canaanites is an illustration of the ultimate triumph of the Church.

I. THE FACT OF THIS TRIUMPH. We have encouragements to think that the Church will not only be saved, but will be saved with honour—will triumph. 1. This implies the *destruction of her enemies*. We need not look for that in violence, after the manners of the Crusades or of the Inquisition. (1) *Spiritual* foes, such as sin, temptation, death, will cease to exist. (2) *Human* foes will cease to be foes by the turning of enmity into submission to Christ. 2. It implies the bestowal of *honour* on the Church. She shall shine like the sun, no longer despised. 3. It implies the enjoyment of *great happiness*. Darkness represents sorrow; sunlight represents joy. 4. It implies the gift of *power*. No influence on earth is so powerful as that of the sun. The people of God will have opportunity for noble service and for the exercise of large faculties. 5. It implies the exercise of *benevolence*. The sun scatters light, warmth, life. He brings new life out of the death of winter, and spreads beauty and glory over the face of the earth. The triumph of the Church will not be like that of old tyrannies, marked by bloodshed and misery, but a source of life and joy and glory to all within its reach. There is *healing* in the wings of the Sun of righteousness.

II. THE SOURCE OF THIS TRIUMPH. 1. It is accorded by *God*. Deborah speaks of it in prayer. It was not the courage of the warrior, but the unseen help of God that secured the victory to Israel. We grow fearful as we see the raging might of evil, and compare this with the trembling weakness of our own hearts. But God is with us; he makes the cause of the Church his own. Christ has already conquered, and now he calls us only to meet defeated foes. 2. It is secured through *devotion to God*. The enemies of God perish. These are not men whom God treats as enemies, but such as set themselves in enmity against him. They who triumph are the lovers of God. The essence of religion is love to God, and this is here the ground of the assurance of victory given by him. 3. It is attained by *silent and gradual means*.

The sun does not burst out suddenly, he makes no noise to announce the coming day. So the triumph of the Church is gradual as the growing dawn, silent as the spreading light. Yet, like the light, it will be recognised by its visible presence and its bountiful fruits.—A.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER VI.

Ver. 1.—**Midian.** In Numb. xxii. 7 we read of the Midianites as allied with the Moabites in their hostility to the children of Israel, and we find them willing agents of Balaam's iniquitous counsels (Numb. xxv. 6, 17, 18; xxxi. 7, 8), and suffering a terrible chastisement from the Israelites in consequence. An abiding national feud was the natural consequence; and this, added to their love of plunder, no doubt led to the present invasion in company with the Amalekites (ch. iii. 13, note). Observe the contrast between the victory described in Numb. xxxi. and the defeat narrated in this chapter.

Ver. 2.—**The dens . . . and caves.** In the writer's time certain hiding-places called by the above names were traditionally known as the places where the Israelites took refuge during the terrible Midianite invasion. The limestone hills of Palestine abounded in such caves.

Ver. 3.—**Children of the east.** We first find this term in Gen. xxix. 1, where it is applied to the people of Haran. Comparing the analogous phrases, "the east country" (Gen. xxv. 6), "the mountains of the east" (Numb. xxiii. 7), "the men of the east" (Job i. 3), "the east" (Isa. ii. 3; Matt. ii. 1),

we gather that the country lying to the east of Palestine as far as the river Euphrates was called the east country, and that the various tribes of Arabs and others who peopled that desert were called "the children of the east" (see ver. 33 and ch. vii. 12; viii. 10).

Ver. 4.—**Left no sustenance, &c., i. e.** neither grass, nor corn, nor fruit. It is added, **neither sheep, nor ox, nor ass.** These all either died for want of food or were seized by the Midianites. The next verse explains that the enormous multitudes of their cattle and camels consumed the whole produce of the ground.

Ver. 5.—**As grasshoppers.** See the striking description of the destruction caused by locusts in Joel iii. I have heard travellers in India describe the sudden darkening of the sky by a flight of locusts.

Ver. 8.—**A prophet.** Literally, *a man, a prophet*, just as Deborah was described as *a woman, a prophetess* (ch. iv. 4). It is interesting to observe the flow of the spirit of prophecy in those early days between Moses and Samuel, before the dispensation of the prophets had risen to its height. **I brought you up from Egypt.** Note the constant reference to the exodus as a fixed point in their national and religious life (see ver. 13; ch. ii. 1).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—10.—*The fruit of ingratitude.* What a condemnation of Israel there was in the simple statement of facts by the mouth of the prophet, without exaggeration and without comment. God had brought them up from the land of Egypt with a mighty hand and a stretched-out arm; when they were in bondage he had broken their yoke; when they were oppressed he had set them free; when the multitudes of Moabites, and Ammonites, and Midianites, and Canaanites, had opposed their entrance into the land of promise, God had brushed them all away and given their land to the Israelites. He had accompanied these acts of grace and power with a simple command not to worship the idols of Canaan, but to remember that Jehovah was their God, but they had not obeyed his voice. They had forsaken God, to whom they owed all they had, and they had turned to heathen vanities. What need to say any more? They were now reaping what they had sown. They were helpless because they had cast off him who had helped them so wondrously, and who would have been their help in every time of need if they had not so wantonly forsaken him. And in like manner how often will a bare statement of facts be enough to overwhelm us with guilt and shame! Let any man be his own prophet, and with unflinching truth record the incidents of a year or a day of his own life. "God in his abounding grace and love redeemed me by the blood of his dear Son; he freely forgave me my trespasses and sins; he received me into the adoption of children, by Jesus Christ, unto himself; he sealed me with the Holy Spirit of promise; he crowned me with loving-

kindness and tender mercy; he showed me the kingdom of heaven, and bid me enter into it; he showed me the deadly evil of sin; he showed me the beauty and loveliness of goodness; he said to me, Abhor that which is evil, and cleave to that which is good. But I have not hearkened to his voice; I have forgotten his love, and despised his grace; I have disbelieved his word, and have believed the lying promises of sin; I have loved the world; I have been the slave of my own lusts, and the subject of my own passions; I have turned aside with the multitude of evil-doers, and I am now eating the fruit of my own doings; I have forsaken God, and so God has forsaken me."

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—6.—*Israel's extremity.* With repeated defection a severer punishment is needed and inflicted. Midian is not only a neighbour, but one who encircles Israel on south, south-east, and east. It was a name given to the great Arab tribes living east of the Red Sea, and south and east of Canaan. Unlike a comparatively civilised nation, they are not satisfied with receiving tribute; they render husbandry and the arts of civilised life impossible by lawless raids, ceaseless devastation, and wanton destruction. It is a new terror. Israel may be overwhelmed and stamped out if this curse of the wilderness be not restrained.

I. ISRAEL'S ABANDONMENT OF JEHOVAH IS PUNISHED BY AN APPARENT ABANDONMENT OF ISRAEL BY JEHOVAH. It seems a light punishment; really there could scarcely be a harder one. Let the sinner and the backslider consider what their condition would be were God *just to treat them as they treat him*. Even the mildest phase of such discipline could not be long bearable. Simply to be left to oneself—let alone—what tragic possibilities does that suggest! But when enemies of the most ruthless description overrun our land, and have us at their mercy, how much does abandonment mean! It is in such times we learn how much we owe to Divine interposition hour by hour. The moral consciousness of Israel was consequently lowered. So of all in like cases.

II. THE MANNER AND EXTENT OF THEIR DISCIPLINE ARE SUGGESTIVE OF THE HEINOUSNESS OF THEIR OFFENCE. Things had come to such a pass that only a full experience of the worst of their heathenish and idolatrous neighbours would avail. There is little or no love of God left; let the consequences of their unbelief teach them a bitter hatred of evil; in time it will drive them back to the doctrine and practice of truth for very life. By and by they will learn to love it again. We have but to think of God's loving nature and infinite tenderness to see how desperate such a measure is. If forbearance failed, no other remedy would suffice but this. All unbelief is this potentially. It was a glimpse of the horror of a godless world.

III. IT WAS A SALUTARY DISCIPLINE, BECAUSE IT LED THEM TO REPENTANCE AND PRAYER. God had no pleasure in this long agony; but neither, on the other hand, would he shorten it until due cause appeared. The result justified the severity. Saints often regard their calamities amongst their greatest mercies. How roughly handled have been some of God's dearest ones! But the worst is not ours to bear, since Christ died. There is no calamity we cannot take to him. He will distil sweetness from wormwood itself, and give us help in time of sorest need. "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." He may be nearer to us in the affliction than in the prosperity.—M.

Vers. 7, 8, 11, 34.—*Divine mercy: its adaptation and sufficiency.* The cry of distress is heard instantly by Jehovah, and the answer begins to come at once. But only as is best for the sinning nation. As there was discipline in the misery to which Israel was reduced, so there is still discipline in the succession and several instalments of the mercy of God. The aim is not merely nor so much to deliver from the material evil to which they were subject, but to root out the unbelief and develop the spiritual life and moral heroism of the people.

I. THE IMMEDIACY OF GOD'S MERCY. "*It came to pass, when the children of Israel cried, . . . that the Lord sent a prophet.*" There appears to be no interval. God begins to readjust his relations with Israel at once. But the material boon is not

granted then. The sting must rankle until true repentance is forthcoming. Deliverance would have been a very questionable blessing under the circumstances. Freedom and independence are responsibilities as well as birthrights. So God hears the cry of the sinner always. "Not what we wish, but what we want," that in the end what we wish may be rendered spiritually advisable and blessed. The measure of comfort here was that God was not silent, prayer was not unavailing. There is hope in the opening of mercy's door, even though it be in reproof.

II. THE SUCCESSIONS OF GOD'S MERCY. First the cry of desperation and repentance, then the outward reproof, then the direction, encouragement, and training of a deliverer, then the recovery of national freedom, prosperity, and prestige. Flower-like. So God adapts his blessings to the moral and spiritual capacity of his people. The Divine view of our misery and its requirements is the reverse of the human; we think of the material suffering, God of the moral defect and sin. These mercies as they come in train are manifestly education, that the work of grace may be effectual. "Grace for grace" is a law of his kingdom. And the dignity of God is never lost.

III. MERCY IN ITS CULMINATION. God did not stop short of ultimate deliverance, although it was not achieved at once. So "he crowneth us with his loving-kindness and tender mercy." It is no mere secular and vulgar deliverance. It is national re-creation. The chivalry of Israel is called forth. It is even more a religious than a military triumph. So the salvation of the soul has its splendours and glories. It is absolute, complete, and magnificent, crowning the life of the faithful. "An abundant entrance will be ministered" into the kingdom of his Son. "We are more than conquerors" through him.—M.

Vers. 7—10.—*Merciful reproof.* The answer to prayer begins in reproof. An anonymous messenger is sent, a prophet probably from amongst the Israelites themselves. In such a season of distress and seclusion they would become strangers even to themselves. No biography is given of the prophet. He is raised for the occasion. His message is simple. But it is the utterance of the people's own national and individual conscience. He is a "voice crying in the wilderness," and saying, "Repent!"

I. THERE IS ENCOURAGEMENT EVEN IN GOD'S CHIDINGS. For—1. *They are better than absolute and final silence.* 2. *They are meant to bring us back to him, and not to drive us away.* 3. *His severity is to prepare us for his gentleness.*

II. IT IS OFTEN AS NECESSARY AND PROFITABLE TO BE IMPRESSED WITH WHAT WE ALREADY KNOW AS TO RECEIVE NEW TRUTH. Revelation is not primarily intended to satisfy intellectual cravings, but to stimulate and enrich the moral nature. A sermon may be a mere exhortation, an impressive *resumé* of acknowledged truth, and yet more valuable than if it were full of theological discoveries. Knowledge of God becomes religious and living when it is *realised* and acted upon. In this connection notice—1. *How impressive the personality of the prophet.* 2. *The heightening of the conscience of sin by contrast with remembered and recited mercies.* 3. *The tone and style of the discourse.* It was short, direct, spoken to the conscience. Its chief message and its sting is in the conclusion. No word of comfort is uttered. The people are left with their consciousness of sin. But this in itself is a gracious work, and preparatory for everything that is good. Thorough repentance is the condition of deep and lasting piety.—M.

Vers. 7—10.—*God sought and found in times of trouble.* I. TROUBLE DRIVES MEN TO GOD. The people forsook God in their prosperity, and neglected his service so long as they enjoyed their comfortable homes in peace. But now they are miserable fugitives hiding in wild mountain caves, they remember his goodness and cry to him for help. This is a common experience. It is to our shame that it must be confessed. We ought to seek God for his own sake, to worship him in the beauty of holiness, not merely to obtain blessings for ourselves. In prosperity we should recognise tokens of his love, and so lift up our thoughts to him in grateful recognition of his goodness. To turn to God only in the hour of our need is a sign of base selfishness. Nevertheless it is better to seek him than not at all. And if it is disgraceful in us that trouble should be needed to drive us to God, it is merciful in him to send the

trouble for that object. The calamity which leads to this result is the greatest blessing. Herein we may see the end of many of the most severe forms of adversity. They are sent to us in our indifference to rouse us to our need of God, and lead us to seek him. Hence we may conclude that if we sought God aright in happy circumstances we might be spared some of the troubles which our spiritual negligence renders necessary to our soul's welfare (Hosea v. 15).

II. IF GOD IS TRULY SOUGHT IN TROUBLE HE WILL CERTAINLY BE FOUND. As soon as the people cried God heard them, and sent them first a prophet and then the deliverer Gideon. If we forsook God in our prosperity it would be reasonable that God should forsake us in our need. But he does not deal with us according to our sins. Our claim does not lie in our merit, in our obedience and fidelity, in anything of ours, but in his nature, and character, and conduct. Because God is our Father he hears us not out of consideration for our rights, but out of pity for our distresses. Therefore we need not fear that he will not respond to our call. To doubt is not to show our humility, but our distrust in the mercy of God and influence of Christ's sacrifice and intercession (Jer. xxix. 11—13).

III. WHEN GOD IS FOUND IN TROUBLE HE DOES NOT ALWAYS BRING IMMEDIATE DELIVERANCE. Israel called for help in need. God did not send the help at once. The people expected a deliverer, God sent a prophet. No word of promise is given by the prophet that relief will be accorded to the temporal distress of the nation. He speaks only of sin, and shows the ingratitude of the people, that they may feel how richly they deserve the calamities which have fallen upon them. They think most of their distresses, God of their sins. They cry for deliverance from the yoke of the Midianites, God wishes first to deliver them from the yoke of iniquity. Therefore the prophet of repentance comes before Gideon the deliverer. So we must expect that when God visits us in our sins he will deal with us so as to save us from spiritual evil before relieving us of physical distress. Christ bore the sicknesses and infirmities of his people, but his great work was to save them from their sins (Matt. i. 21).

IV. THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF SIN WHICH MUST PRECEDE DELIVERANCE IS PRODUCED BY A PROPHET'S MESSAGE IN THE MIDST OF TROUBLE. The trouble is necessary to soften the hearts of the people, and make them willing to listen to the prophet. Yet the trouble does not produce repentance. For this a prophet is needed. The prophet does not make any prediction, nor does he give any revelation of God; he simply reveals his hearers to themselves. We need prophets to show to us our own true character. Much of the Bible is a revelation of human nature which would not have been possible without the aid of prophetic inspiration. The call to repentance consists (1) in recounting the ancient mercy of God, for it is in the light of God's goodness that we see most clearly our own wickedness; and (2) in directly charging Israel with ingratitude and apostasy. All sin includes the sin of ingratitude. Till we feel this it is not well that God should show us more mercy. Therefore the stern John the Baptist must precede the saviour Christ; but as Gideon followed the prophet, full salvation will follow repentance and submission.—A.

EXPOSITION.

Ver. 11. — **An angel**, &c. Rather, *the angel of the Lord*, otherwise called "the angel of his presence" (Isa. lxiii. 9). In vers. 14, 16, 23, for *the angel of the Lord* we have simply *the Lord* (see ch. ii. 1, note). **An oak**. Rather *the oak*, or *terebinth*, as it should be rendered. It was doubtless a well-known tree still standing in the writer's time (see ver. 19). Compare the mention of *the oak* (terebinth) at Shechem (Gen. xxxv. 4); *the great oak* (terebinth) in which Absalom was caught (2 Sam. xviii. 9); *Deborah's palm tree* (ch. iv. 5, where see note). Observe the simple way in which the ministration

of the angel is introduced, as if it were a matter of course in the eyes of him who is the Lord of the millions of the heavenly host, those ministers of his who do his pleasure. Human scepticism, the twin sister of human selfishness, would blot out all creation except itself. **To hide it**, &c. These graphic touches give a lively picture of the straits to which the Israelites were reduced by the Midianite occupation.

Ver. 12.—**Appeared**. Angels were not always visible when present (see Numb. xxii. 31; 2 Sam. xxiv. 17; 2 Kings vi. 19, &c.).

Ver. 13.—**If the Lord be with us**, &c.

The utter dejection caused by the Midianite oppression breathes in every word spoken by Gideon. But how reassuring the angel's words were. **Which our fathers told us of.** This is a distinct reference to the national traditions, which are elsewhere alluded to (cf. Exod. xii. 26, 27; Ps. xlv. 1; lxxviii. 3—5; Jer. xvi. 14).

Ver. 15.—**Wherewith shall I save Israel?** &c. Compare the unwillingness of Moses (Exod. iii. 11; iv. 10, 13), of Saul (1 Sam. x. 21, 22), of Jeremiah (Jer. i. 6), of Amos (Amos vii. 14, 15), and of St. Peter (Luke v. 8). Also in ecclesiastical history that of Ambrose, Gregory the Great, and others. The least fit are usually the most forward, the most fit the most backward, to undertake great offices (ch. ix. 8—15). True humility is the usual companion of true greatness (see 2 Cor. ii. 16; iii. 5).

Ver. 17.—**A sign that thou talkest with me**—that it is indeed thou thyself that speakest to me, even God, and that there is no illusion.

Ver. 18.—**My present.** *Minchah* means sometimes a *present* made to man, as in ch. iii. 18; but it more commonly means a *sacrificial offering* (Gen. iv. 3—5), which seems to be its meaning here, as explained vers. 19, 20. When coupled with *zevach*, the animal sacrifice, *minchah* means the meat and drink offering.

Ver. 19.—**Unleavened cakes** (Gen. xix. 3; 1 Sam. xxviii. 24). The necessary haste gave no time for the use of leaven, which is one explanation of the unleavened bread at the passover (Exod. xii. 33, 34, 39). **Presented it.** A word specially used of sacri-

fices and offerings (Amos v. 25).

Ver. 20.—**Lay them upon this rock, as upon an altar, and pour out the broth, as a drink offering or a libation** (see ch. xiii. 19).

Ver. 21.—**There rose up fire, &c.** The consuming of the sacrifice by fire from heaven was the token of its being accepted (cf. ch. xiii. 20, 23; also 1 Kings xviii. 23, 33, 38; 1 Chron. xxi. 26). **The angel of the Lord departed, &c.** In the very similar case of the angel who appeared to Manoah (ch. xiii. 15—20), the angel ascended in the flame of the altar. It is probable that he did so in the present instance, though it is not expressly stated how he disappeared (cf. Acts viii. 39).

Ver. 22.—**Gideon perceived, &c.** Gideon's suspicions were now turned into a certainty. It was indeed God that had spoken to him by his angel (ver. 17). **Alas, &c.** Gideon speaks thus in terror of the death which he thought must be the penalty of seeing the angel of the Lord (see ch. xiii. 22, and note). **Because.** Rather, *therefore, or to this end, viz., that I should die.*

Ver. 23.—**Peace, &c.** Cf. Dan. x. 19, and John xx. 21, 26; Luke xxiv. 36—39. Hence the name of the altar, *Jehovah-shalom*—"The Lord is peace," is at peace with me.

Ver. 24.—**For naming altars built in commemoration of particular events** see Gen. xxii. 14; xxxi. 47—49; xxxiii. 20; Josh. xxii. 34, &c.

Ver. 25.—**The grove.** See ch. iii. 7. The size of the *asherah* is indicated by the order in ver. 26 to use it for the altar fire.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 11—24.—**The preparation.** God's agents, whether kings, or judges, or prophets, or apostles, are reasonable agents. They are not inanimate machines or blind instruments; they are living, thinking, feeling, reasonable, men. When they are called to great and heroic works they must be endued with great and heroic thoughts. A high sense of justice (2 Sam. xxiii. 3), a noble contempt of gain (1 Sam. xiii. 3), wisdom with lofty courage (Ezek. ii. 6, 7), the enthusiasm of love with the moderation of prudence (2 Cor. vi. 3—10), are the qualities that must be found in them respectively. The sword which is to pierce must first be sharpened; the intelligence which is to guide must first be enlightened; the arm which is to prevail must be strengthened; the spirit which is to triumph over difficulties and obstacles must be awakened, and fed, and sustained. The work to which Gideon was called was no common work. A nation to be upheaved from the lowest vassalage of spiritless slaves and dejected helots into victory and freedom; another nation to be dragged down from power, and possession, and supremacy, and dominion, with no apparent instruments with which to effect it. And who was Gideon? The least considered member of a poor family, of a divided tribe, of which no name was famous in the annals of his country; a man unknown and unheard of, whose occupation was to thresh corn stealthily, lest the Midianites should take it; a man thought nothing of by his own countrymen, and contemptuously overlooked by his foreign masters. But he was the chosen instrument for delivering Israel. **HE MUST THEN BE PREPARED.** And two things were necessary in the first place: one *to awaken in him a*

thorough trust in God; the other to *inspire him with a proper trust in himself*, springing from his trust in God. And so the angel began at once with the startling words, "The Lord is with thee." And the answer of doubt and despair from the lips of Gideon was met by a look of God—a turning of God's face upon him, a lifting up of the light of God's countenance upon him, with a power of unutterable grace, and a word of further encouragement: "Go in this thy might; . . . have not I sent thee?" and again he said, "Surely I will be with thee!" And the scene that followed—the tarrying of the angel till his return with the kid and the unleavened cakes; the solemn sacrifice on the altar of rock; the outstretched staff in the angel's hand touching the flesh and the cakes; the bursting forth of the fire from the rock; the word of comfort, Peace be unto thee! and the disappearance of the angel as mysteriously as he came—was all directed to the same end, to work in Gideon's mind the deepest possible conviction that God was with him, and that the whole love and power of the Almighty was on his side.

But it was also necessary to inspire him with a proper trust in himself. As long as he thought of himself only as the drudge of the family, a thresher of wheat, a skulker by the wine-press; as long as he felt himself one of a degraded caste, as long as he had no hope, no spirit, no sense of having a mission, he would and could do nothing great. The man, the warrior, the captain, the deliverer, the hero, the martyr, must be aroused within him. And so the voice of God addresses him, "The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour. Go in thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites. Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite Midian as one man." And if these words fell, as no doubt they did, upon a spirit already chafed with a sense of his country's degradation; if burning thoughts of shame and humiliation were smouldering in his mind as he threshed his wheat in secret, trembling at every sound, and casting suspicious glances on every side, for fear some Midianite should be near, how would these words of homage and respect from the mysterious stranger awaken his soul to a new estimate of his place in the world. It was no longer a time to hide, and despair, and complain, and whine, and use the weapons of the weak, guile and subtlety, it was a time to rise, and act, and dare, and risk, and he was the man to be at the head of this new movement. This was Gideon's preparation.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 11—15.—*The call of Gideon.* Unexpected by himself and undreamt of by the nation. The whole land is given over to idolatry and wretchedness, but God is at no loss to find his servant. A strong man—a hero, ignominiously concealed, he is a symbol of Israel's helplessness.

I. THE PERSONALITY AND RELATIONS OF GIDEON ARE A REBUKE TO ISRAEL, A VINDICATION OF THE SOVEREIGN WILL OF GOD, AND A REVELATION OF THE SOURCE OF ALL TRUE POWER. He is the youngest scion of an insignificant family in a secondary tribe. Not only has he had no special religious or political training, he is an idolater, or at any rate belongs to an idolatrous family. And he is addressed whilst acting in a manner of which he must have felt ashamed. Hidden, helpless, a sceptic regarding Divine existence or intervention. The culture and religion of Israel are ignored. So God always chooses whom he will to act, to preach, to suffer. There was no danger that Gideon would be credited with the work of deliverance as an achievement of his own originality and innate power.

II. THE OCCASION WAS SIGNIFICANT OF THE HELP GOD INTENDED TO GIVE. He comes when things are at the worst. It was a sign that he would work out a radical deliverance. Not partial help, but complete salvation would be due to him.

III. GIDEON IS AN INSTANCE OF THE POWER OF RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE. He has heard in some way or another of God's works in his nation's history. Evidently his thoughts have been occupied with them. A rough interpretation has been arrived at, helping him to grasp the meaning of the situation. His was not total ignorance, but a knowledge preparing for higher revelations and corresponding achievements. Truth smoulders in the mind until it bursts into flame. Inward impressions and

realisations of sacred knowledge prepare for the Divinely-arranged circumstances of life, critical moments, and heavenly visitations.

IV. GOD'S MANNER OF DEALING WITH THE DIFFICULTIES AND OBJECTIONS OF HIS INTENDED SERVANT IS VERY INSTRUCTIVE. He accommodates himself to the thoughts passing through Gideon's mind. By his words he drives the brooding mind into distressful paradox. The past achievements of Gideon are remembered, and a corresponding respect shown him. The revelation of himself is gradual. He is considerate, gracious, and painstaking with the heart he intends to make his own. "Have not I sent thee" is sufficient guarantee for God's servant. There ought to be no misgiving when that assurance has been given.—M.

Vers. 12, 13.—*The paradox of the Divine presence.* It has ever been the case that spiritual blessing is hard to be realised in the absence of material prosperity. There is something almost ironical in the contrast between the assertion "Jehovah is with thee," and the actual condition of the person addressed. It was the more inconceivable because of the external nature of the religious sanctions and rewards of the age. Mosaicism abounds in material and temporal blessings. A natural question, then, for Gideon was, "Where are these?" There are many who think very similarly to-day. Are they right or are they wrong? If God be with a man ought he not to prosper? Notice first—

I. THE DIFFICULTY OF GIDEON. It was to reconcile the assurance of God's presence with the signs of actual weakness and distress all around him. There is something very ingenuous in the identification of himself with his people. "Thee" is altered by him to "us." It is full of promise for the future of the hero. He knows of no blessing in which his country does not share. And that is the right temper in which to face all such problems. The glorious past of Israel rose up before his mind's eye. How different from the days in which his lot had fallen! Had God any favour to his people? Why, then, this utter inaction? this absence of all miraculous intervention? If the old records were to be credited God had delivered his people with a "high hand and an outstretched arm;" now to all appearance the heavens had "withdrawn, and become astronomical." And yet how great and immediate the need for God's help! Day by day deeds were wrought under the sun that could not be spoken of. So there are times in these days when crimes are committed, nascent movements of religious and secular moment are withered, and the dial of civilisation is set back. The great calamities of war, pestilence, earthquake, &c., seem to call to heaven, but it is silent. Is it indifferent? Has the hope of man been a dream?

II. HOW IT MAY BE ANSWERED. *Other things being equal*, the blessing of God ought to make rich, and happy, and prosperous. But that is not its chief end in the present. It is first to make right. And God is in the seed as much as in the plant. He has many ways of fulfilling his promises. The blessing of Gideon was a *potential* one. It began even then in him, but it was to be communicated to others. It was as really a blessing for Israel as if the oppressor had been driven from her borders, &c. Spiritual influences begin deeply, secretly, and mysteriously; but they are ere long known by their fruits. God was with Israel repentant in the moment of her repentance. And yet the external evils of her condition were as yet unchecked. God can be with a man in fulness of blessing and help, even when he is poor, and wretched, and helpless; but he will not continue so if he be obedient to the heavenly will. Spiritual blessing then should be expected to show itself, at least first, spiritually and inwardly; and an individual may be the holder of it vicariously for a nation or the race.—M.

Ver. 14.—*The assuring thought of God's servant.* "Have not I sent thee?" This is one of those words by which the saint has often been "strengthened with all might in the inner man." It lifted the heroes of Israel, the reformers, the men of the commonwealth of England, above the common weaknesses of their age and race. "A man, a woman, with a mission"—why not? Some careers are wholly explained by it; some simple achievement critical in history; and many unostentatious, secret services rendered in the Master's name, under the influence of overpowering impulses, more or less transient or permanent.

I. THE LIFE IS THEREBY CONSECRATED AND DIRECTED. A man is not at liberty to follow his own private aims when the heavenly voice speaks thus within him. A higher plane of life and action is thereby created. An unseen influence isolates and consecrates him. This usually imparts greater definiteness to his conduct. He does not "beat the air."

II. THE MOST DIFFICULT DUTIES ARE IN THIS FAITH RENDERED PRACTICABLE. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" "All things are possible to them that believe." The fatalists of history—Cæsars and Napoleons—have left their mark and proved the strength of a ruling idea. But this conviction is reasonable and of infinite power. The greatest changes the world has seen have been wrought under its influence—apostolic mission, reformation, missionary enterprise at home and abroad, Sunday school origin and extension. And so in the things of the individual life and private sphere.

III. THROUGH ITS INFLUENCE A PRESENT CONSOLATION AND AN ETERNAL REWARD ARE SECURED. Has God sent us? Then he will take note of our behaviour, and sustain our flagging strength. Has God sent us? our service cannot be for earthly gain. He is our Master; and as he sends no man "a warfare at his own charges," so the saint is sustained by the hope of the "crown of glory that fadeth not away."—M.

Ver. 17.—*Asking for a sign.* The stranger said, Have not I sent thee? I will be with thee. Gideon wanted a proof that he was one who had authority, &c., to use such words. That he was a supernatural visitor he suspected; he wanted to be sure. But it was rather to ascertain the reality of his own heavenly calling, which at first he could hardly believe. There was no other evidence open to him; and he asked the evidence peculiar to his epoch. He was altogether different therefore from the Jews of Christ's time, who required a sign, but no sign would be given them, save the sign of the prophet Jonas. They had signs enough already, but had no spiritual perception.

I. THIS REQUEST AROSE NOT FROM WANT OF FAITH, BUT FROM SELF-DISTRUST. Might not this all be a dream? And who was he himself? It is the doubt of a mind suspicious of its own sanity, &c. All this argues a deep humility than which nothing could fit him better for the work he has to do. God forgives a desire like this, and answers it; but doubts as to himself and his character, &c., are of another sort.

II. GOD ENCOURAGES ALL TRUE SERVANTS BY SOME TOKEN OF HIS PRESENCE AND HELP. Moses at Horeb; Paul in the temple in his trance—"Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles" (Acts xxii. 21). Many holy men have had such inward urgings and impulses. And all earnest service is accompanied by tokens of the Divine blessing. We are encouraged, therefore, to look for these signs. Their absence ought to cause no concern. Their nature will depend upon the kind of work we are doing.—M.

Vers. 18—21.—*The sign—the present turned into a sacrifice.* The narrative speaks for itself; it is a picture of Eastern hospitality. Gideon's sense of the extraordinary nature of the visit expresses itself in his taking upon himself the duties of servant as well as host, to keep it secret. As the angel said to Manoah, "I will not eat of thy bread" (ch. xiii. 16), so the visitor betrays his true character as an angel of Jehovah in abstaining from the food. Of the phrase "and they did eat" in Gen. xviii. 8, the Targum gives the gloss, "they seemed to him to eat." Angels, not having a corporeal nature, do not require mortal sustenance. But the most striking incident in the narrative is the touching of the flesh and cakes with the angel's staff, and their being consumed by fire from the rock. This circumstance betokened not rejection of the gift, but its acceptance in a higher sense; the present becomes a sacrifice.

I. ALL BEST GIFTS ARE SACRIFICIAL. That which is given in order to a return; from gratification of self-love, ostentation, vanity; from custom; or without any real sense of loss, sacrifice, &c., is not accounted great by generous minds, however intrinsically precious it may be. As the sentiment enhances the value of the gift, even trifling in our eyes, so that which has cost pain, effort, loss of loving hearts, is

"above rubies." Personality often thwarts the purpose of a well-intended gift; therefore it has often to be effaced ere the true end is attained.

II. HOW GOD OFTEN DEALS WITH THE GIFTS OF HIS SERVANTS. It is not in a few isolated miracles that this has taken place. The mode of procedure is a principle of his kingdom, and is seen in every true life. 1. In carrying on a spiritual work to unforeseen developments, and so that demands are made the agent did not at first contemplate. Some kinds of spiritual effort are like sinking a shaft for a mine, the ultimate expenditure of labour and means is not ascertainable. That which was almost a pastime becomes a serious task. Consequences are evolved that call for heroism and generous self-devotion. 2. Results which were aimed at in the first instance are withheld, and the labourer has to continue steadfast amidst apparent want of success. 3. The labour itself becomes dear, and enthusiasm makes the greatest efforts easy, and the heaviest burdens light. At first it is "our" work; by-and-bye it is "God's" work. We lose ourselves in the presence of the "not ourselves that maketh for righteousness," who accepts our feeble labours and turns them towards infinite and inconceivable purposes.

III. WHAT IS SUBSERVED BY THIS CONVERSION. 1. It is educative. The subject of it is being taught a nobler life. He is wooed gradually out of the narrow shell of self into the larger atmosphere and arena of Divine love. At first God provokes us to the disinterested passion for himself, then he surprises us into fitting expression of it. The bridges of retreat are cut. 2. Our vague intention is interpreted to our spirits, and is set free. The alchemy of Divine love turns our dross into gold, our water into wine. 3. The permanent utility of man's work is thereby secured. Like the devotion of Christ, it receives an absolute worth in perfected sacrifice.—M.

Vers. 22—24.—*Jehovah Shalom, or spiritual forebodings stilled.* The religious experience of one is often of help to others. At all times has the commerce of man with the unseen taken place; it is a necessary element in his spiritual life. The test of true religion is the sentiment thus awakened.

I. THE NATURAL FEAR OF GOD, AND ITS CAUSE. The sentiment expressed by Gideon a general one, but peculiar to Israelites. The Greek knew not this fear, because his conception of the nature of the gods was different. They were but as men, only more glorious and powerful. To the Israelite God was the Supreme in holiness and authority. Reverence for the character of God deepened into fear, because of the tradition that a visitation such as he now received meant death, either immediate or near at hand, and because of the sense of sin. No man could see God and live. We have the remnant and echoes of this belief still among us, in the fear of supernatural appearances and intimations. It is the dread of the simple, absolute holiness and goodness of God, deepened by our sense of sinfulness. The culprit trembles in presence of the judge. Had Israel rightly served God, this dread would have disappeared. Were men's hearts right with him, they would welcome his presence and prize his visitations.

II. THE WHISPER OF PEACE. It is a token of good-will. The terror which overcame the strong man is allayed. Christ gives a deeper tranquillity. He fills the breast with the sense of spiritual reconciliation—"the peace of God which passeth all understanding." And this is felt in the trial hours of life, and in the agony of dying. It steadies and evens the spirit amidst the most afflicting circumstances. In conversion the fear of the sinner under conviction is often intense. But who shall tell the rapture when peace is found?

III. THE MEMORIAL. How fitting that it should be commemorated, and by such a symbol! The altar is the meeting-place of man and God. The monument. The church. It told to others of an individual, secret transaction and experience. Here was won a victory over self, a triumph of duty more signal than Marathon, Bannockburn, or Morgarten. It is well to tell men of God's mercies to us; and this intimation was an eloquent appeal to men to draw near and receive a like blessing.—M.

Vers. 11—14.—*Diffidence.* Gideon was a great and gifted man who distrusted his own powers, and was in danger of failing to follow his true vocation through modest diffidence. When the angel accosted him as a "mighty man of valour," the express-
JUDGES.

sion overwhelmed him with astonishment. It came upon him as a new revelation. While there are conceited persons who value themselves too highly, and are over-ready to undertake rash enterprises for which they are quite incompetent, there are also good and able men like Gideon who are not aware of their own powers, and are in danger of neglecting the high trusts God has committed to them from self-distrust and modesty.

I. THE GROUNDS OF DIFFIDENCE. 1. *Adversity.* Gideon could not believe in the presence of God and the possibility of relief for his country, because the troubles of the time seemed to preclude all hope. We are tempted to distrust while the prospect is dark. Yet God is often nearest to us when the distress is deepest. 2. *The absence of any sign of God's presence.* Gideon saw no miracle, and he could not discern the presence of God in less striking events. As sensationalism in religion is a dissipation which unfits the soul for quiet, natural modes of worship, so the habit of depending on marvels and prodigies for faith in Divine truth weakens the sense of the Divine in the calm and orderly movements of nature and providence. 3. *Lowly circumstances.* Gideon considered himself the least important member of a poor and obscure family (ver. 15). Possibly he was despised in the household for his retiring habits. Men are often taken at their own estimate of themselves until their true character is put to the test. A man's own relatives are sometimes the last to recognise his merits. We are all more or less influenced by surrounding circumstances, and given too much to judge by appearances.

II. THE MEANS FOR OVERCOMING DIFFIDENCE. 1. *God knows his servants' true nature and powers.* He takes no note of outward appearances. Rank, riches or poverty, family honour, count for little with him. He seeks out the right man wherever he is to be found—at the threshing-floor, by the sheep-fold, in the fishing-boat. God never calls any man to any task for which the man does not possess the requisite talents. 2. *God is with his servants when they are obeying his voice.* He never calls a man to a special task without giving him special grace to perform it. If he commands his servant to undertake a difficult mission, he is certain to go with him and stand by him in the time of need. Diffidence comes from regarding self; true confidence from looking away to God. So Moses was diffident as he thought of his own weakness, but made brave to face Pharaoh by the assurance of God's presence (Exod. iii. 11, 12); and Paul dared to stand alone before Cæsar with confidence because "the Lord stood with" him (2 Tim. iv. 17). 3. *God sometimes uses special means to confirm the faith of his servants.* Gideon asked for a sign, and it was given him. To some no sign can be granted (Matt. xii. 39). If no special signs are granted us now, we should remember (1) we are not called to Gideon's work, and (2) we are not left in the religious obscurity of Gideon's age, but have the revelation of God in Christ, the greatest of "signs."—A.

EXPOSITION.

Ver. 25.—*The same night, &c.* The iron was hot; it was time to strike. As regards what follows, there are two ways of understanding the verse. One, that of the A.V., supposes that only one bullock is spoken of, and that "the young bullock" belonging to Joash is further described as "even the second bullock of seven years old;" to which it is objected that a bullock of seven years old is not "a young bullock," "the bullock of an ox," as the Hebrew phrase is, and that there is no explanation of the meaning of "the second bullock;" and that the Hebrew manifestly describes two bullocks: (1) Joash's young bullock, and (2) the bullock of seven years old. The other supposes two bullocks, and instead of *even* has the more natural rendering *and*. The

only objection to this, by far the most natural rendering, is that Gideon is not told what to do with the first bullock. But it is a simple explanation that the two bullocks were used in the laborious work of demolishing the altar of Baal, and removing the earth and the stone to build the altar of the Lord, and that when the work was finished one of the bullocks—the seven-year-old—was sacrificed. For the grove see ch. iii. 7, note.

Ver. 26.—*This rock.* Rather, *the keep or stronghold* of Ophrah, where also the high place was; just as the temple was in the stronghold of Zion, and the hold of the house of Baal-Berith at Shechem was in the citadel of the place (ch. ix. 46). In the ordered place. The meaning of this phrase

is uncertain. It may either be rendered as in the A. V., meaning on the levelled ground ordered and prepared for the building of the altar; or it may more probably be rendered *with the arranged material*, i. e. the stones which were laid in order at the bottom, and the wood which was laid in order upon the top of the altar (cf. Gen. xxii. 9). *The material* may either refer to that taken from the altar of Baal, which had been thrown down, and which was then ordered to be used in building the altar of the Lord, or to its own *arranged material or superstructure*, the wood of the *asherah*.

Ver. 27.—*Then, i. e.* the next night. He would have done it the next day; but even his father's household, as well as the men of Ophrah generally, were so infected with the idolatry of the times, that he was afraid of being interrupted by violence.

Ver. 28.—*The grove*. See ver. 25. *The second bullock*. There must be some special meaning in this description, *the second*. Can it refer to his place in the team, the young

bullock being the leader, *the first*, and the seven-year-old the wheeler, *the second*?

Ver. 29.—*They said, Gideon hath, &c.* No doubt one of the ten servants (ver. 27) employed by him had spoken about it.

Ver. 31.—*Stood against him*. The words describe their hostile, menacing, attitude, clamouring to have Gideon brought out that they might kill him. *Will ye plead, &c.* The emphasis is on the *ye*. Joash met and silenced their pleading by threatening death to any that should plead for Baal. Baal shall plead for himself. Joash's courage was rising under the influence of his son's brave deed.

Ver. 32.—*Jerubbaal*, i. e. *Jarob Baal*, let Baal plead. In ch. vii. 1; viii. 29, 35; ix. 1, &c., *Jerubbaal* is used as the synonym of *Gideon*, just as in English history Cœur de Lion is used as a synonym for Richard. The name *Jerubbaal* appears as *Jerubbesheth*; *besheth* or *bosheth*, meaning *shame*, i. e. a shameful idol, being substituted for *Baal*, as in the name *Ishbosheth*, for *Eshbaal* (see 2 Sam. ii. 8; 1 Chron. viii. 33).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 25—32.—*The action commenced*. Idolatry was the evil which Israel had done in the sight of the Lord. Idolatry was the sin which had brought upon Israel the terrible Midianite servitude. The hour of deliverance had come, but it must be the hour of repentance too. And repentance must be in deed, not in word. Baal must be cast off before the Lord would go forth with their armies. The first blow in the great contest that was coming on must be a blow struck against Baal-worship, and then the Lord would strike a blow against Midian. And so we see the mighty man of valour, who had been prepared for his work by his interview with the angel of the Lord, and who was to sweep the Midianite locusts from off the soil of his beloved country, commence his work as a bold religious reformer. How could he fight the battles of Israel while the altar of Baal crowned the heights of his native city? how could he call upon the Lord to help him while the shameful abomination stood up to testify against his own flesh and blood? And so his action began with a deed as bold as that of Luther when he burnt the Papal bull in the sight of all the people. While men were asleep, little dreaming of what was about to happen, he rose from his bed, called ten of his servants to him, and, marching straight up to the altar of Baal, surrounded as it was with awe and superstition, he threw it down. He cut down the statue or pillar of Ashtoreth, and before the morning light shone upon Ophrah, the altar of Jehovah was smoking with its whole burnt offering as openly and as conspicuously as the altar of Baal had done. It was with amazement that the men of the city saw the great altar of their god levelled to the ground, and a new altar standing in the sacred inclosure. But Gideon nearly paid for his holy boldness with his life, and his great work was well-nigh nipped in the bud; for when it transpired that he had thrown down the altar, there arose a cry for his blood. The angry idolaters surrounded the house of Joash, and demanded that Gideon should be brought out to them, that they might slay him and avenge the insult done to their god. It was a critical moment, and Gideon's life hung upon a thread. But God had a work for him to do, just as he had for Peter when Herod put him in prison and sought to kill him, and so he was not suffered to fall into their hands. His father's happy word, Let Baal plead for himself, was caught up by the people, and all thoughts of punishing Gideon seem to have gone out like a candle before a puff of wind. He was now free to pursue his great enterprise. But here we may pause for a moment to read some great lessons to ourselves. *We dare not enter upon any*

work for God while any known sin is casting its deadly shade upon us. Are you seeking to do something for God? begin by plucking out the right eye that offends, by throwing down the altar of the false god within you. Lay the axe to the root of the tree, and at any risk or cost clear yourself of complicity with sin. Then you may begin your work. Again, *be bold in a right cause*; do not quail before risk and danger, because no great work was ever done without it; and if our work is of God, dangers will fade away before his Almighty help. God can brush away the difficulties and hindrances that threaten us, like cobwebs. Again, remember that nothing creates enthusiasm and attracts companions so much as courage and daring. The timid may work single-handed all their lives; but a leader "bold and brave" never lacks followers. There is excitement in bold action, and courage commands confidence. Beyond a doubt "the boldness of Peter and John" (Acts iv. 13) was one of the things that helped to build up the Church in those days of danger and persecution. St. Paul's unflinching courage in the face of Jews and Gentiles was a great power in his missionary work. The fearless attitude of Luther and of the English Reformers before all the power of Pope and priests and the civil sword breathed a spirit of untameable resolution into the hearts of their followers. And so it always has been, and always will be. Boldness of action springing from deep conviction of truth is the surest presage of success. Let us learn to be courageous in every good thing; not flinching from dangers, or shirking consequences, or hanging back in cowardly delay, when once our judgment is clear of what is right to be done. Then may we hope to lead others and to stir up many to help in the good cause of truth and righteousness. Enthusiasm, decision, and courage, coupled with a sound mind, are among the great wants of our day.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 25—30. — *The first work.* The training of Gideon has now fairly commenced, and it is not allowed to lag. There is no interval between command and execution. The growth of Gideon's spiritual character is gradual, and there is a beautiful fitness in each step; but it is also rapid and decisive.

I. IT IS A RELIGIOUS WORK OF INDIVIDUAL AND NATIONAL CONSEQUENCE. An idolatrous altar to be razed, an altar to the true God to be reared. The plan of the altar of Baal was different from that of the altar of Jehovah, and could not be mistaken for it. The whole neighbourhood knew. How many such substitutions are taking place every day—the symbol of wickedness and unbelief giving place to that of faith. Our works are our true words to men. Much of the Christian religion consists in witnessing. There cannot be too marked a contrast, if it be real. A religious revolution of the most radical description took place. The whole question of religion was once more raised, and settled otherwise.

II. IT WAS A COMPLETE WORK. Not only destruction, but construction; negative and positive. All true witnessing should be such. Negative criticism merely is mischievous. It is not enough to declare ourselves by abstention and inaction, or by rebuke and captious judgment; we must do the works of God. We must build as well as destroy.

III. IT WAS A TEST OF HIS SINCERITY. 1. *It committed Gideon.* There could be no drawing back. It was a challenge to the whole people. The hill-top was seen from afar. 2. *It required energy.* No slight task even as a manual labour. Organisation, leadership, vigorous and timely effort were necessary. 3. *Courage was demanded.* A new beginning, a great reform, had to be made. Difficult to take the initiative. Many reasons could have been found for conformity to established usages. The most rancorous hatred would be at once aroused. Only high faith and clear, Heaven-informed purpose could have secured his success.

III. IT WAS A PERSONAL, IMMEDIATE, AND DOMESTIC WORK. Joash, infirm as his faith in Baal was, was responsible for the erection and maintenance of the altar of Baal. The worship was popular, and he patronised it. That had to be publicly retracted. How near at hand was the field of Gideon's first work! His own life had to be openly changed; his home had to witness his zeal for God. There are many who profess to be at a loss for something by which to testify their love for God and

righteousness. Let them do righteously, love mercy, and walk humbly before God, and there will soon be disturbance and persecution. Our own homes are to be the scenes of our first obedience. What have we done there? And although, apparently, a day intervened between the vision and the work of demolition, yet no time was lost. The first fitting opportunity is sought and utilised, and the interval is occupied with the necessary preparations. So God expects prompt obedience from all his children. The smoke of that new altar—how much it signified! Are we yet his? Let us lose no time in giving our hearts to him. What is our record? Let our deeds speak for us. Time is short.—M.

Vers. 29, 30.—*Who hath done this thing?* A frequent inquiry. A natural curiosity—to trace up to causes; a religious rancour—to visit punishment upon the author.

I. THE WORLD TAKES NOTE OF THE ACTIONS AND LIVES OF THE RIGHTEOUS. The effects of religion are ever an astonishment, a delight or a vexation. There is something in them that piques curiosity and rouses interest. Men tried to explain Christ. Religious questions ever the most keenly discussed.

II. THE REASON OF THIS IS IN THE VITAL IMPORTANCE OF THE QUESTIONS INVOLVED. Temporal convenience and interests are compromised. The craftsmen of Ephesus. Life and death eternal depend upon our conduct here. Christians are a reproof to the unfruitful works of darkness.

III. IT IS WELL WHEN OUR DEEDS ARE INQUIRED ABOUT THAT THEY SHOULD BE GOOD, AND NOT EVIL. The detective usually tracks the criminal. How much better so to act that we shall not fear when men discover our works. So act that when revelation comes "they may be ashamed who falsely accuse our good conversation in Christ." To our own Master we stand or fall. In that day we shall not heed the judgments of men.—M.

Vers. 31, 32.—*Jerubbaal, or, Is an idol anything?* How mighty the work was Gideon had wrought at once appeared from its effects. His father is won over, and so argues for him that the Abi-ezrites are first silenced, and then converted. The nickname of Gideon showed the process of the change.

I. THE GRAND ARGUMENT AGAINST IDOLATRY. Isaiah (ch. xlv.) expresses the contempt of the true Israelite for idols. But no one has formulated the argument better than Joash. It is as forcible to-day in India and Africa as in the days of Gideon. The same is true of the world-powers and principles idols represent.

II. THE LIVING WITNESS TO THE FORCE OF THIS ARGUMENT. No monument could equal himself. It was an instance of a man against a god—yea, against all the gods of heathenism. A heathen convert is such a witness. And the heroes of faith are the grand arguments against the evil principles and influences they overthrew and survived. The gospel reveals an extended view of the same question, beyond death and the grave; "Fear not them which kill the body," &c.—M.

Vers. 25, 26.—*Gideon the iconoclast.* I. REFORMATION MUST PRECEDE DELIVERANCE. As the prophet of repentance appeared before Gideon the deliverer, so even Gideon did not undertake the work of fighting the Midianites until he had first effected a religious reformation among his own people. It is vain to treat symptoms when the radical seat of a disease is untouched. Spiritual apostasy had brought on Israel national humiliation. The distress could not be safely relieved till the sin was destroyed. God will not deliver us from the trouble into which sin has brought us before we begin to turn from the wicked course which made the trouble a necessary chastisement. It is true that under the gospel we are not made to wait for the return of Divine favour until all sin is destroyed. On the contrary, it is one great characteristic of this new dispensation of mercy that restoration to the favour of God does not wait for, but precedes, and is the chief cause of, a perfect reformation of life. Nevertheless, (1) this is only possible after *repentance*, which is the turning from sin in desire, and (2) when accompanied by *faith in Christ* as both Master and Saviour, which implies submission to his will, and carries the prophecy of a new life inseparably connected with the spiritual fruits of faith (Acts iii. 26).

II. REFORMATION BEGINS WITH THE DESTRUCTION OF EVIL. Gideon's first work is to destroy the altar and idol of false worship. To wrench out the stones of the massive altar of Baal and tear up the "Asherah" was no easy work; yet it was necessary. It is pleasant to prophesy smooth things, and we should prefer to trust entirely to the power of light to dispel the darkness, of life to overcome death, of the gospel of peace to supplant all forms of evil. But it is not possible to succeed by this means alone. Evil must be exposed, challenged, resisted, overthrown. Sin must be rebuked; wrong practices must be directly thwarted and frustrated. This implies aggressive action on the part of the Church, and long, arduous, united efforts to throw down the great structures of sinful institutions, and uproot inveterate habits of vice and crime. Intemperance, commercial dishonesty, religious hypocrisy, &c., must be directly met and fought by practical agencies suited to cope with the strength and size of great national sins.

III. REFORMATION IS NOT COMPLETE WITHOUT THE SUCCESSFUL ESTABLISHMENT OF A NEW AND BETTER ORDER. Gideon's reforming work is not complete when he has thrown down the emblems and instruments of idolatry. This is but half his work. He must next erect an altar to the true God and sacrifice thereon. The danger of every attempted reformation is lest it should stay with the work of destruction—lest the iconoclast should not be also a reformer. It is more easy to throw down than to rebuild. The passions of the destroyer are not always joined to the patient, calm wisdom and energy of the renovator. Yet it is vain to cast out the evil spirit unless we fill the place of it with a better spirit (Matt. xii. 43—45). Mere negative Protestantism, negative temperance, negative anti-war movements are likely to lead to abortive issues unless they are supplemented by influences which promote and establish positive good. Conviction of sin must be followed by the creation of a new heart if the future life is to be pure (Ps. li. 10).—A.

EXPOSITION.

Ver. 33.—*The Midianites, &c.* See ver. 3, note. The valley of Jezreel. Rather, *the plain*, "the great plain of Esdraelon," as the Book of Judith styles it (Judith i. 8; see ch. iv. 13, note). The great plain of Jezreel, or Esdraelon (which is the Greek form of the name), through which the Kishon flows, is eight hours in length from east to west, and five hours (twelve miles) in breadth from north to south. It is described as "a very extensive and fertile plain shut in between the mountain ranges of Samaria and Mount Carmel on the south, and of Galilee on the north," and extending from the Mediterranean at the Gulf of Caïpha, or Haïpha, to the valley of the Jordan. The access to it from the fords of Jordan in the neighbourhood of Bethshan (or Beïshan, called by the Greeks *Scythopolis*) made it the natural place for invasion by the wild tribes east of Jordan, as it is to this day. Particular parts of this great plain are called "the valley of Megiddo" and "the plain of Samaria." For a full account of the plain of Esdraelon see Stanley, 'Sinai and Palestine,' ch. ix. Went over, *i. e.* crossed the Jordan. It appears from vers. 3—5 that these invasions were repeated at certain seasons. When they had plundered all they could get, and eaten up all the produce of the land, they would go back for a while to their own country east of Jordan, and then return again. So they did

now, but they met with a different reception this time.

Ver. 34.—*The Spirit of the Lord, &c.* See ch. iii. 10; xi. 29; xiii. 25; xiv. 6, 19; cf. Isa. xi. 2; lxi. 1; John xx. 22; Acts xiii. 2; xx. 28; and 1 Cor. xii. 4. Abi-ezer. His own family (ver. 11; see Josh. xvii. 2). In Num. xxvi. 30 the name appears as *Jeezer*, by a very defective transliteration—*Aiezer* represents the Hebrew letters. The *ð* has probably fallen out by accident. Here we have the immediate fruit of Gideon's daring in the cause of God. The whole family of Abi-ezer, numbering probably thousands, sprang to his side.

Ver. 35.—*He sent messengers, &c.* Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali were the adjacent tribes—Manasseh (*i. e.* the half tribe of Manasseh, west of Jordan) on the south, Asher on the west, and Zebulun and Naphtali on the north. Three of these were the very tribes who had fought under Barak, and it is pleasing to see Asher now joined with them instead of abiding in his breaches. This ready compliance with the call was the consequence of the Spirit of the Lord being upon Gideon. Came up. No doubt Gideon was encamped upon one of the southern hills that overlooked the plain, probably Gilboa, just as Barak was on Mount Tabor (see ch. viii. 8—12). To meet them, *i. e.* Gideon and the Abi-ezrites.

Ver. 36.—If thou wilt save, &c. There is something touching in Gideon's diffidence of himself, even now that he found himself at the head of a large force. The thought that he was "the least in his father's house" seems still to possess him, and he can hardly believe it possible that he is to save Israel. In his humility he craves a sign that he is indeed chosen and called.

Vers. 37—40.—It is difficult to guess what led to this somewhat quaint sign which Gideon asked. Possibly the dews were usually heavy upon the hill of Gilead (ch. vii. 3,

note) where Gideon was encamped, as they seem to have been on Mount Gilboa (2 Sam. i. 21) and on Hermon (Ps. cxxxiii. 3), and sheep-skins may have been a common protection against the cold nights, as in Afghanistan; and he may have noticed how often in the morning both the skin that covered him, and the ground around, was wet with the heavy dew. And this may have suggested the double test, by which his faith was, through God's condescending mercy, confirmed and established.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 33—40.—*The Divine side of human history.* This section reveals an extraordinary change in the whole aspect of things in Israel. At the beginning of the chapter we see the people utterly cowed before their enemies, skulking in caves and dens and hiding-places, while their insolent masters take possession of their land, their food, their substance, and all that they had. For seven years had this state of things endured. It had become a matter of course that, when the season came, the Midianites and their allies should swarm across the Jordan, cover the land, devour everything, stay as long as they pleased, and then return unresisted to their own country. But at the close of the chapter a change, like the sudden melting of the snow in the spring, has taken place. There are indeed the same Midianite hosts, "like grasshoppers for multitude, and their camels without number, as the sand by the sea side for multitude" (ch. vii. 12); there are the same kings in all their pride of power, and the same princes as greedy as ravens for their prey, and as hungry as wolves in pursuit of the spoil (ch. vii. 25, note). But when they have reached the well-known plain of Jezreel, instead of tame submission, instead of the frightened people running like rabbits to their holes, they find a nation in arms. Manasseh was up and in the field; Naphtali and Zebulun had flocked armed to the national standard; Asher had answered the call of the trumpet; and 32,000 men were at the feet of their leader. Instead of running, hiding, and yielding, there was arming, and combining, and defiance throughout the land. Now what was the cause of this great change? The respective numbers of the Midianites and Israelites were the same, the respective qualities of the nations were the same, the shape of the ground was the same, the resources of the two peoples were the same; whence the difference? The difference lay in the motive power of the will of God. Before, his will was to give Israel up into the hands of Midian to punish their idolatry; now, his will was to deliver them on their true repentance. It is just the lesson taught by the prophet Isaiah in the sublime message which he delivered to Sennacherib: "Hast thou not heard long ago, how I have done it; and of ancient times, that I have formed it? now have I brought it to pass that thou shouldest be to lay waste fenced cities into ruinous heaps. Therefore their inhabitants were of small power, they were dismayed and confounded: they were as the grass of the field, and as the green herb, as the grass on the house-tops, and as corn blasted before it be grown up." What regulates the world is the motive power of the will of God acting upon and through the wills and the capacities of men. There are in the men virtue, courage, sagacity, ability, prudence, wisdom, counsel, on the one hand; or meanness, cowardice, blindness, weakness, rashness, folly, inconsequence, on the other; and these qualities have each their own proper force and momentum; but it is the will of God which gives to them their direction and their results. It is to be noted too that God in his providence raises the instruments and gives the qualities which are to accomplish his will. As was observed before, God's agents are reasonable men, and it is by their great qualities that they accomplish the work committed to them. But who gives them those great qualities? How came Abraham, and Joseph, and Moses, and Samuel, and David, and Judas Maccabeus to appear on the world's stage just when they did? It is very true that Abraham's faith, and

Joseph's prudence, and the wisdom of Moses, and the integrity of Samuel, and the heroism of David and Judas accomplished those great results at critical moments in their country's history which have made their names famous for ever. And if we are looking at events on their human side, it is quite true to say that Abraham founded the Hebrew race, and that David founded the Jewish monarchy, and Judas rescued his country from destruction. But it is of supreme importance, if we would see God in history, and in the history of our own times in particular, to recognise in the sages, and heroes, and reformers, and also in the philosophers, and discoverers, and inventors, whose several labours have changed the aspect of the world at particular epochs, God's special instruments sent for that very thing; and to recognise in the changes brought about, not merely the action of those instruments, but the results of the will of God. As long as God is pleased to preserve a nation in greatness and power, he continues to raise up among them warriors, divines, men of genius, and statesmen. When the set time of decadence is come there arise no great men among them; their mighty men become as women (Jer. li. 30), and counsel perishes from the wise (*ibid.* xviii. 18). In applying these truths to our own Church and country it behoves us to remember that we owe all our own national prosperity, both in spiritual and temporal things, to the undeserved mercy of God; that the continuance of that prosperity depends upon the continuance of his favour; and that the only way by which to preserve that favour is to walk in righteousness and godliness. Unless God wills to maintain our power and greatness among the nations, all the courage and policy in the world will not suffice to do so; and even courage and policy may cease to grow among us. The example of Gideon further teaches us that boldness on God's side is the prelude of triumph over foes, and that what makes leaders of the right stamp is their investiture by the Holy Spirit of God.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 33—40.—*The crisis and the confirmation.* Gideon's first task demanded moral rather than physical courage. It was restricted in its sphere. It witnessed to the principle that sin must be removed ere national or individual calamities can be permanently cured, or God's help vouchsafed. The stage now clears for the larger life and wider influence.

I. THE ENEMY PRESENTS HIMSELF IN SUDDEN, OVERWHELMING FORCE. A remarkable juncture. Esdraelon, the battle-field of Canaan. Here thrones and kingdoms had been lost and won. To the heart of flesh it would have been the death-knell of hope. There was no proportion between the extent of his possible preparation and the magnitude of the crisis. Many would have advised a policy of temporizing inaction. To the sent of God the circumstances pointed all the other way. Elijah at Horeb. Paul at Athens. The Son of man longing for his "hour." Are you in a minority; the only Christian in your office; with everything to discourage and tempt you? "Let not your heart be troubled." Outward difficulties are balanced and overpowered by spiritual reinforcements. "The Spirit of the Lord came upon him."

II. GIDEON'S SUMMONS TO ARMS MEETS WITH UNEXPECTED SUCCESS. "He blew a trumpet," *i. e.* he used the means. But probably he did not expect anything like the result. He was touching chords that vibrated in unforeseen directions. He didn't know the moral power he had acquired by his first work. We never can gauge the extent of our moral influence. Jerubbaal is the magnet. Strong in God, in himself, at home, throughout the nation. We are all guilty herein; we think God's people fewer and worse than they are. How much one steadfast, heroic soul can effect; how many others he can fire with enthusiasm and endue with courage by his example and actions!

III. SUDDEN SUCCESS OCCASIONS HUMILITY AND DOUBT. Clearly this man is not as others. He becomes strong against odds and vast oppositions, weak and hesitating when all goes well. Adversity and difficulty are plainer in their problems to the spiritual man than prosperity. But perhaps it was the quality of his soldiery he mistrusted. They did not seem of the right stuff for a duel *d'outrance*. Perhaps the very suddenness of his power terrified him.

IV. HE SEEKS FOR WISDOM AND CONFIRMATION OF THE HEAVENLY GRACE. 1. *Pro-*

bably the very scene of his first vision. Association helps an imaginative spirit. Spiritual associations are mightiest. 2. *He proposes a sign that shall reveal his duty.* Under ordinary circumstances this is dangerous and misleading. But the whole background of Gideon's career is miraculous, and he had a warrant to expect miracles. We have a complete revelation and a Divine example. The dew abundant in Canaan; the wetting of the fleece a rustic idea. The doubt is then suggested, What if all this be natural? Therefore—3. *The proof is reversed.* As in experimental science the test of variations is employed, so here in spiritual divination. God accommodates himself to our weakness that he may vanquish it. Henceforth the path is clear and his mind is made up. Have we done all that conscience and revelation have made plain and obligatory? Have we gone to the Divine footstool for the wisdom and strength we required?—M.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER VII.

Ver. 1.—*Jerrubbaal.* The mention of this name seems intended to keep before our minds that it is emphatically the servant of the Lord who is going forth to victory. The well of Harod, i. e. of *trembling*, so called, no doubt, from the incident recorded in ver. 8, that every one who was *afraid* (Hebrew, *hared*) departed from Mount Gilead. The well of *Harod* is not mentioned elsewhere, though two of David's mighty men are called Harodites (2 Sam. xxiii. 25); but it is thought to be identical with "the fountain which is in Jezreel" (1 Sam. xxix. 1), on the slope of Mount Gilboa, and now called *Ain Jahlod*, the spring of Goliath. On the north side, &c. Gideon and his Abi-ezrites were naturally on the south side of the plain, on the hill, apparently Mount Gilboa, which there shuts in the plain. The Midianite host was encamped to the north of him (so it is in the Hebrew), in the valley, i. e. the plain of Jezreel (ch. vi. 33, note). *By the hill of Moreh.* Nowhere else mentioned; probably only a hillock, of which there are many in that part of the plain.

Ver. 2.—*And the Lord said, &c.* It must be remembered that this whole movement was essentially a religious one. It began with prayer (ch. vi. 6, 7), it was followed up by repentance (ch. vi. 27, 28), and the great purpose of it was to turn the hearts of the nation back to the God of their fathers. The Lord himself, therefore, graciously forwarded this end by making it plain that the deliverance from their oppression was his work, and his only. For the general sentiment compare Deut. viii. 10—18; Pa. xlv. 3—8; Zech. iii. 6, &c.

Ver. 3.—*Depart early.* The Hebrew word so rendered only occurs here. Its exact meaning is uncertain, but the old versions generally give the meaning of "depart," "go back." Some, with much probability, connect the word with the Hebrew for a sparrow, and give the sense of "fly-

ing," i. e. returning in haste. The sense of "early" expressed in the A. V. does not seem to be any part of the meaning of the word. See Deut. xx. 8 for the form of the proclamation. *From Mount Gilead.* These words cannot be explained with certainty. The conjectures are—1. That there may have been a Mount Gilead on the western side of Jordan, on which Gideon's army was encamped, though it is not elsewhere mentioned. 2. That *Gilead* is a transcriber's error for *Gilboa*, which only differs by one letter in Hebrew. It is pretty certain that Gideon was encamped on Mount Gilboa. 3. That the phrase was the *formula* used by the whole tribe of Manasseh, on the west as well as on the east of Jordan, although properly applying only to those on the east. 4. Some (reading *maher*, in haste, for *mehar*, from the mount) render "let him return in haste to Gilead," i. e. to his home.

Vers. 5, 6.—*The water, viz., of the well or spring of Harod. That lappeth, &c.* It showed a much more soldierly and self-controlled spirit just to quench the thirst by lapping the water out of the palm of the hand, than to kneel down and drink without stint out of the spring itself. The Lord saw the difference of character indicated by the two actions, and chose his instruments accordingly.

Ver. 7.—*By the three hundred, &c.* Compare the saying of Jonathan, "There is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few" (1 Sam. xiv. 6). The same principles which run through the choice of God's instruments on other occasions appear here. The instruments are to be such in quality or in quantity as to make it quite manifest that the excellency of the power is God's, not man's; and yet the instruments themselves are to be conspicuous for their rare excellence. The shepherd boy who sat on the throne of Israel was manifestly made to sit on that throne by the appointment of God; but what a ruler, what a noble character David was! It has always been deemed one

of the proofs of the Divine origin of Christianity that its apostles were men of such humble station, and yet were able to change the whole religion and morality of the world; and yet what noble stuff Peter and John and Paul were made of! And so here the overthrow of the hosts of Midian by three hundred Israelites was manifestly the effect of the power of God fighting on their behalf. But yet what marvellous heroism was there in those three hundred! what strength of purpose, what iron-firmness of nerve, to see above thirty thousand of their comrades leave them in the face of the myriads of their foes; to remain quietly at their post, and, when the time came, to leave their camp and pour down into the plain. Their self-possession and self-restraint and absence of

self-indulgence in the matter of the water was a true index of the unequalled qualities which they displayed in the sequel.

Ver 8.—*So the people took, &c.* It is almost certain that the passage ought to be rendered, "And they took the victuals of the people in their hands, and their trumpets," i. e. the three hundred took or borrowed what provisions they needed for a few days, and the trumpets, which were to play an important part in the stratagem, from the people who were about to return to their homes. *And the host of Midian, &c.* The writer repeats this to give a perfect picture of the situation. The whole army returned to their homes; the three hundred alone with Gideon in the camp; the Midianite host in the plain beneath.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—8.—*The sifting.* When we consider the extraordinary reduction of Gideon's army from 32,000 to 300 by a process of winnowing, not merely as an isolated fact, but as a portion of the instruction of God's word, we are at once struck with its analogy, in principle, to other broad teachings of the same Scriptures. Let us first consider the case before us, and then compare with it the analogies to which we allude.

I. In a great emergency, at the call of Gideon, 32,000 men with much apparent devotion flocked to his standard. Leaving their homes and their families and their substance, they came forward willingly to meet danger and to endure hardship. To all outward appearance they were all animated by the same spirit, and might alike be credited with a resolution to die for their country and for their faith. But by and by a test was proposed: "Whoever is fearful and afraid, let him return and depart;" and forthwith more than two-thirds of that band shrank from the undertaking. Their hearts failed them; they thought of their homes left unprotected, they thought of the dreadful Midianites and Amalekites and children of the East, so numerous, so fierce, and so irresistible; their faith in God was a dead letter; the shame of deserting their comrades was not sufficient to restrain them; they left the camp and returned, 22,000 in number, to their own homes. But 10,000 remained true to the cause. These faced the danger and stood firm. Another test was then proposed, which should go much deeper, and sift the very choicest spirits from those of more ordinary mould. Of the 10,000 that remained, only 300 were found whose rigid self-denial, and stern self-discipline, and self-possessed presence of mind, showed them to be of that stamp which was necessary for a hazardous undertaking requiring boldness, endurance, watchfulness, and perseverance to insure success. And these 300 elect were accordingly retained to do the work alone; and they did it.

II. Now this is in accordance with THE ANALOGIES both of nature and of Holy Scripture. Take the creation of mankind viewed as intended to glorify God by the proper exercise of the splendid gifts bestowed upon them. Sift them first through a coarse sieve which will only separate the grossly wicked and ungodly, and yet what a large number will thus be found to come short of the purpose for which they were created. If all the irreligious, all the evil livers, all the impure and violent and unjust among mankind, stand separate, what a comparatively small number will remain who seem true to the end of their being, even in outward appearance and in the rough! But if we go on further to sift with a finer sieve, so as to separate the careless, and the selfish, and the worldly, and the hypocrites, and the lukewarm, and so on, and so as to isolate the true saints of God, the little flock, the faithful followers of the Lamb, those who shall shine as the sun in the kingdom of their Father, and be to him for a name and a praise, alas, how will the number be reduced! Apply the same method to Israel. The seed of Abraham were separated from the rest of man-

kind to be God's peculiar people, to fulfil a special purpose in the world as witnesses for God's unity and truth. But, as St. Paul teaches us, "they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called." There be many called but few chosen. There were the multitude, a disobedient and gainsaying people; and there was the remnant according to the election of grace, who believed the gospel, and who trusted in the promised Messiah and obeyed his voice. Or take the parable of the sower. One lot of seed falls by the wayside, and the fowls of the air devour it; another lot falls on the rock, and is soon burnt up by the scorching sun; a third is choked by the thorns, and brings no fruit to perfection; it is only one quarter of the seed sown that falls on good ground, and brings forth fruit with patience. Any one looking at the whole sample would have thought it all destined to be fruitful; but lo! only one fourth part comes to anything.

Now it is important to note this:—1. *With a view to ourselves, that we may sift ourselves before any winnowing of God comes unawares upon us.* There are states of the world, or states of society, or conditions of outward circumstances, when the grain and the chaff, the wheat and the tares, the good fish and the bad, all pass muster, and there is no marked difference between them. Gideon's 32,000 all pass for good men and true. There come changes of circumstances, there comes a winnowing of God, events and situations which try men, which test their character, which put their faith, their integrity, their sincerity, their conscientiousness, their principles, to the proof, and presently of the 32,000 only 300 stand firm. Now it is a matter of infinite moment that we should examine our own selves and prove our own selves before such a sifting takes place. Just as workmen try the strength of the iron which is to support a certain weight, and do not leave it to chance whether it shall be found strong enough or not, so ought we carefully to try our own religious principles, whether they are of a kind that will stand the day of temptation, or of the kind that will break down. It is not enough to come to the front like Gideon's thousands for a moment; are we prepared to stick to our post like Gideon's 300 in the day of conflict and danger? It is not enough to be on the Christian side with the world's multitude for a time; we want that strength and perseverance which will secure our standing with the few when the multitudes fall away. It is important—2. *To notice this lesson of sifting with a view to forming a correct estimate of the probable issues of events.* Look at any number of men engaged in any work, secular or religious, that requires steadfastness, tenacity of purpose, fixedness of principle, fortitude to brave danger and meet difficulties, and the probability is that only a small proportion of them will go through with what they have begun. Faint-heartedness, weariness, fickleness, inconstancy, and clashing considerations, will stop the many midway, and the work, if accomplished at all, will be the work of the few. Especially in work done for our Lord Jesus Christ, for the advancement of his kingdom and for the good of his Church, we must look to the few. The men of prayer, the men of earnest faith, the cross-bearing men, the men whose conversation is in heaven, and who are waiting for Christ, are the handful; but they are the men who will fight the real battle, and who, by grace, will win the real victory.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—8.—*Divinely-ordained tests.* What a contrast the present position of Gideon as Israel's leader, within a few hundred yards of the dreaded foe, from that in which we first find him, threshing wheat in the wine-press secretly! Thus far has the Lord brought him, but much has to be done ere the soldiery he has shall be rendered efficient. Both leader and men have to pass through an ordeal such as must try them to the utmost. Not yet is the onset to be made that shall definitively retrieve the fortunes of Israel. Truly God's thoughts are not as men's thoughts. Everything is in apparent readiness, but delay is observed, and two mysterious tests are enjoined.

1. *THE DESIGN OF THESE TESTS.* Although they must have seemed arbitrary, if not capricious, to many concerned, there is evidently "method in the madness." A partial explanation is given in the words, "The people that are with thee are too

many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, *Mine own hand hath saved me.*" The tests are meant, therefore—1. *To check the unbelief and self-conceit of men.* The vast multitude is reduced to a few that men may give the praise to God, and his power be manifest. It is easy to suppose that such a tendency would show itself amongst the miscellaneous crowd. God could do the work by "many or by few," and it was well for them all to know it. 2. *To secure efficiency.* This would consist, first, in the tried courage and discipline of those who remained; and, secondly, in their faith and inspiration.

II. *THEIR ADAPTATION TO THIS DESIGN.* By the adoption of the first expedient we are not to suppose that so many as left were lacking in ordinary courage. But they were not all heroes, and it was the heroic spirit that was needed. The anxious, irresolute, and timid were got rid of, and those who remained were men in earnest. The second test revealed the presence or absence of rarer qualities. This seems to be its rationale: the Israelites were close to the camp of the Midianites, who must have been watching the singular manoeuvres of their foes. The water where they drank must have been within easy reach for a demonstration, but they remained inactive. This created carelessness, a spirit of bravado in most. When they came to the water, therefore, they thought only of their thirst, and either forgot or despised the enemy. Flinging themselves down, they abandoned themselves to the luxury of quenching their thirst, and by their attitude exposed themselves to surprise and panic. But the three hundred stood up whilst drinking, and so had to lap. In this way they kept themselves alert, and showed that duty, not self-indulgence, was uppermost in their minds. It is the combination of prudence and self-denial with courage which is the most valuable thing in a soldier. The soldiers so tried are kept for the special effort, and the others who had not gone away are held in reserve to follow up the first blow struck. But over and above the special aim of each test, there was a discipline in the compulsory waiting and observing all that they involved—the loss of time, the trial of temper by apparent folly and arbitrariness, and the insignificant handful surviving the tests. So were Israel and its leader prepared. Is not all this like the discipline of life? God is so dealing with his children. The revelation and guardianship of great truths are committed only to the tried few; the signal movements and heroic duties of his kingdom are the care of elect souls, who when tested have been found true. The qualities requisite for a critical movement in a campaign are just those most valuable in life—faith in the leader, dauntless courage, superiority to self-indulgence, and constant prudence. We are to endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ. We know not what faults have to be corrected, what high service lies before us.—M.

Ver. 2.—"*Mine own hand hath saved me.*" Nothing more impressive than the secrecy observed by God in bringing on his kingdom. He is not lavish of signs and wonders. Sufficient for the occasion, and no more. Not always asserting himself. So unobtrusive, that vain and empty minds are ready to conclude him non-existent or inoperative. "Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour." The place of God at the beginnings of things—the springs and roots; and the spiritual nature of God accounts for much of this. He loves to work by despised instruments and obscure agencies. "*Thy gentleness hath made me great.*"

I. *HOW PRONE THE NATURAL MIND IS TO THIS IMPRESSION.* Israel, as here stated, was constantly imagining it. The moral systems, ancient and modern, social and political nostrums and panaceas, of men show this. The glorification of courage, intellectual gifts, material resources.

II. *ITS MISCHIEVOUS EFFECTS.* Egotism; materialism; intellectual and moral pride. "For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God" (Rom. x. 3). "Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life" (John v. 40).

III. *PROOFS THAT MAN CANNOT BE HIS OWN SAVIOUR.* 1. The miraculous deliverances of Israel. The weakness of luxurious and materially enriched times. The providences of life. The soul's inner experiences. 2. *The true conception of salvation.* A spiritual more than a material fact. Our relation to the law of God. "Not by works of righteousness which we have done," &c. (Titus iii. 5). "And be found

in him, not having mine own righteousness," &c. (Phil. iii. 9). Inward witness—"By the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Cor. xv. 10).—M.

Ver. 2.—*Success not dependent on numbers.* One of the first objects of a general's anxiety is to see that he has a sufficient number of men under his command. But Gideon is made to understand that he has too many, and must reduce his hosts before going to battle with the sanction and assistance of God. In Christian work the tendency is to rely on external appearances of strength manifested by a great array of workers rather than on the inconspicuous spiritual sources of real power. While remembering the need of more labourers of the right kind for God's field (Matt. ix. 37, 38), we must also understand that the work may be suffering through excess in numbers of those labourers, whose character and method of work are not of the highest order.

I. THE POWER OF GOD IS FAR MORE IMPORTANT THAN ANY HUMAN AGENCY. In all Divine work the real energy is centred in God. We are but the instruments in his hands. The temptation is to forget that the true power and blessing come wholly from him (Deut. viii. 17), and to think so much of our labour in planting and watering as to ignore the one most important thing, God giving the increase (1 Cor. iii. 7). A gardener can only minister to the spontaneous life of nature; and if he becomes so infatuated with his skill as to attempt to manufacture a plant, his total reliance on his own resources will, of course, only reveal folly. So anything which leads us to magnify human agencies at the expense of Divine power will as surely produce failure. 1. *The imposing appearance of too great numbers may lead us to neglect the aid of God.* When we are few we feel our helplessness, and so learn to turn to God for strength; when we are many we imagine ourselves strong, and thus while we are (apparently) strong in ourselves we are really most weak. Presumption takes the place of faith, and human agency is relied on instead of Divine energy. The numbers of the Church, the elaborate organisation of her societies, the gifts and genius of individual men are all snares if they tempt us to neglect the one supreme source of success. The danger of the Church in the present day is to rely too much on the machinery of her institutions, instead of seeking the vital power which can alone inspire the energy of spiritual work. 2. *The character of too great numbers may be such as to hinder the bestowal of the help of God.* God cannot bestow his spiritual gifts on a people who are not spiritually-minded. If we gain numbers at the expense of spirituality, we do this also at the expense of Divine aid. Better be few, and constituting such a worthy temple that the Holy Ghost can dwell and work in us, than numerous, but possessed by a worldly spirit which degrades the temple into a house of merchandise.

II. THE QUALITY OF ANY HUMAN AGENCY IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE SIZE OF IT. It has been well said that it would be better for the cause of Christianity in the world "if there were fewer Christians and better ones." Xerxes found the vast numbers of his Asiatic hordes a hindrance to effective warfare with the disciplined Greeks. The great want of the Church is not more labourers, but better ones—better ministers, missionaries, teachers; not more sermons, but more able preaching; not a more ponderous library of Christian literature to meet the attacks of unbelief, but a few more powerful works (one book, 'Butler's Analogy,' was probably more effective in counteracting the influence of Deism than all the rest of the voluminous apologetic writing of the eighteenth century). It would be well if Church discipline were a reality, and Christian workers selected with conscientious care. The workers should be sifted by tests applied to their character and abilities. 1. Tests of *courage* and *zeal* are useful; so Gideon dismissed the timid, and only willing men were retained. The only valuable soldiers in Christ's army are the volunteers who delight in his service. 2. *Slight incidents* will often reveal character, and serve as tests of the quality of God's servants (ver. 7).—A.

EXPOSITION.

Ver. 9.—*Get thee down, &c., i. e. attack the camp at once with thy 300 men.* But if thou art afraid to do so, go down first alone with Phurah thy servant, and hear what they are saying in the camp.

Ver. 11.—*The armed men.* The exact meaning of the word here rendered *armed men* (*chamushim*), and which occurs Exod. xiii. 18; Josh. i. 14; iv. 12, is a little uncertain, but it is generally thought to be synonymous with another word (*chalutsim*), also rendered *armed* (Numb. xxxii. 32; Deut. iii. 18), and to mean literally *girded*, i. e. prepared to fight. These fighting men, as distinguished from the numbers of the nomads who were with their camels and cattle scattered all along the plain, were all collected in the camp, to the edge of which Gideon and Phurah crept stealthily in the dark.

Ver. 13.—*A cake.* The Hebrew word occurs nowhere else. *Of barley bread.* The commonest kind of bread, the food of only the poorer classes, indicating, therefore, the humble origin and station of Gideon. *A tent.* Rather, *the tent*; what in a Roman camp would be the *pretorium*, the general's tent. The words at the end of the verse are heaped up to indicate the total and entire upsetting and overthrow of the tent, symbolic of the rout and destruction of the Midianite host.

Ver. 14.—*This is nothing else, &c.* The dream and the interpretation are striking evidences of the terror which Gideon's name had already inspired among the Midianites. Because, although both the dream and the interpretation were of God, for the encouragement of Gideon in his great undertaking, yet they followed the course of nature and the laws of psychology. The presentiment that God had delivered Midian into Gideon's hand is exactly like the terror in the minds of the Canaanites which preceded the arrival of Joshua (Exod. xxiii. 27; Deut. ii. 25; xi. 25; Josh. ii. 9—11).

Ver. 15.—*It was so, &c.* The effect upon Gideon was like magic. He not only learnt the state of panic in which the Midianites were, but he had a further certainty that God was with him. His simple piety and adoring gratitude threw him at once upon his knees to thank God, and to cast himself anew upon his strength with undoubting trust. His hands were indeed strengthened, and he lost not a moment in returning to his 300, relating in a few words the incident of the dream, and bidding them follow him. *The Lord hath delivered, &c.* Cf. 1 Sam. xiv. 20.

Ver. 16.—*Trumpets, which had been collected from the whole army* (ver. 8, note).

Lamps. Rather, as in the margin, *torches*, within the pitchers, so as not to be seen till the pitchers were broken, when the torches would flare with a sudden blaze. The *pitchers* were vessels for drawing water, as appears from Gen. xxiv. 14, 16, 18, 20. They were doubtless of earthenware, as they were so easily broken.

Ver. 18.—*The sword of the Lord, &c.* The word *sword* is not in the original here, though it is in ver. 20. It has either dropped out of the text accidentally, or what we have here is the shorter form of the war-cry. It is observable how careful Gideon is to put the name of Jehovah first. It was his cause against Baal, and the battle was to be fought in his strength, and the glory of the victory was to be his. The cry, "The sword of Gideon," would be peculiarly terrible to the many who had heard of the dream, of which the fulfilment was come so quickly.

Ver. 19.—*The middle watch.* The ancient Israelites divided the night into three watches of four hours each, from sunset to sunrise, i. e. from six p.m. to six a.m. The first watch, from six to ten, is not mentioned in the Old Testament; but we have the *middle watch* mentioned here (from ten to two), and the *morning watch* (from two till six): Exod. xiv. 24 and 1 Sam. xi. 11. According to this, Gideon's attack would have taken place soon after ten p.m., or towards eleven, the time when the sleep would be the deepest, the watchmen of the first watch having lately fallen into their first sleep. The later Israelites adopted the Roman division of the night into four watches (Matt. xiv. 25; Mark vi. 48; cf. Luke xii. 38; Mark xiii. 35).

Ver. 21.—*They stood, &c.* Gideon's men did not advance, but stood, each company in the place assigned to them, at different sides of the camp. This had the effect of awakening the whole camp simultaneously, and they started to their feet and ran hither and thither in confusion, shouting as they went. Undisciplined troops, especially excitable Orientals, are very liable to be thus thrown into a panic. *Fled.* The Cethib has, *caused to fly*, i. e. either "put to flight," or "carried away," as in ch. vi. 9; Exod. ix. 20. In the former case the nominative must be *the Israelites*; in the latter, *their tents, herds, stuff, &c.*, must be understood. Both are very awkward. The Keri, *fled*, is probably right, unless *caused to fly* has the sense of "bid them fly," in which case the preceding word, *cried*, might be taken in its common sense of *they sounded an alarm*. The whole clause would then run thus: *And all the camp ran; and they sounded a retreat, and bid them flee.*

Ver. 22.—*Blow the trumpets, &c.* Hearing the confusion, the three companies blew their trumpets, probably more loudly than before, to give the impression of a hot pursuit being at hand. The Midianites, thinking the enemy were upon them, and not being able in the dark to distinguish friend from foe, mistook their flying comrades for pursuing Israelites, and fell upon and slew one another. In like manner the Philistines had done when attacked by Jonathan and his armour-bearer (1 Sam. xiv. 20), and the Ammonites, Moabites, and Edomites when attacked by Jehoshaphat (2 Chron. xx. 23). *Beth-shittah*. House of acacias. The exact situation of it, and of *Zereth* and *Tabbath*, is unknown. They must have been villages lying on the route from the plain of Esdraelon to the banks of Jordan, probably between Little Hermon on the north and Mount Gilboa on the south, where there was a very ancient high road from Jezreel to the Jordan by Beth-shan. Indeed it is highly probable that *Shutla*, a village mentioned by Robinson, marks the site, as it retains the name of Beth-shittah. For *Zereth* some read, with some of the old versions and manuscripts, *Zeredath* (*r* and *d* being scarcely distinguishable in Hebrew), and identify it with *Zarthan* near Succoth, mentioned Josh. iii. 16 and 1 Kings iv. 12; vii. 46. *Abel-meholah* (the meadow of the dance) was the birthplace of Elisha (1 Kings xix. 16), and is mentioned in conjunction with Beth-shan, Jezreel, and Zartana in 1 Kings iv. 12. Eusebius tells us that in his time *Abel-meholah* was called *Beth-maiela*, and situated ten miles below Beth-shan, or Scythopolis. There was also, he says, close by an *Abel-maiela*.

Ver. 23.—*The men of Israel, &c.* Gideon's disbanded army got together again very

quickly when they heard of the flight of the Midianites. Zebulun is not mentioned.

Ver. 24.—*Mount Ephraim*. Rather, *the hill country of Ephraim*. For some reason Gideon had not invited the Ephraimites to join in the war before (ch. viii. 1); but now, seeing the extreme importance of seizing the fords of Jordan, so as to stop the escape of the Midianites, he sent messengers in all haste to the men of Ephraim, who accordingly "took the waters unto *Beth-barak* and Jordan." The *waters* seem to mean a number of streams running from the hill country of Ephraim into the Jordan, and which had to be crossed by the Midianites before they could reach the Jordan fords. The site of *Beth-barak* is unknown. It is not thought to be the same as *Bethabara beyond Jordan*, where John was baptising (John i. 28). *Beth-barak* must have been on the west of Jordan.

Ver. 25.—*Oreb*, a raven, and *Zeeb*, a wolf. The rock known afterwards as the *rock of Oreb* (Isa. x. 26), and the wine-press (see ch. vi. 11) known as the *wine-press of Zeeb*, were so called from being the places where these two princes were taken and slain by the Ephraimites. In like manner the *well of Harod* is called by the name it afterwards received (ver. 1), and the *palm tree of Deborah* in like manner (ch. ii. 5), and *Lahai* (ch. xv. 9). These are valuable indications (to which many more might be added) of a living tradition older than the written history. The capture of Oreb and Zeeb is celebrated in Ps. lxxxiii. 11 and Isa. x. 26. On the other side Jordan, i. e. the east side of the river, which Gideon had now crossed, as is related in ch. viii. 4. The narrative runs on here to complete the history of the doings of the men of Ephraim, and goes back at ch. viii. 4 to take up the thread of the history of Gideon (see ch. ii. 1—6, note).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 9—25.—*Faith*. The whole Book of Judges is so full of lessons of faith, as the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews teaches us when he refers to "Gideon, and Barak, and Samson, and Jephthah" (Heb. xi. 32), that we cannot help recurring to the subject of faith if we would honestly draw the instruction which each portion of Scripture is intended to convey. But though the same general lessons of faith—its nature, its triumphs, its sure rewards—recur in the successive histories, yet each has some proper lesson peculiar to itself. Referring then to the remarks on ch. i. 8—21 for such general lessons, we will notice some peculiar trials to which the faith of Gideon was subjected.

I. THE SACRIFICES OF FAITH. Let us put ourselves in Gideon's place. Suddenly called out of insignificance and obscurity, he had played the part of a statesman, a leader, and a general. As the result of his well-concerted measures, he found himself at the head of 32,000 men. As he reviewed this great force, so unexpectedly got together, how must his heart have swelled with pride and hope! No doubt that great army was the instrument by which he was to deliver Israel, and he could but feel some self-gratulation at the success of his plans. To a man of an eager spirit as he must have been, no greater disappointment could have occurred than to be told to

dismiss that army without striking a blow. Just when he was about to acquire immortal fame to himself, and to save his country, and establish the great religious reformation which he had begun, by their means, to see them, and all his own prospects with them, melt away like a heap of snow before the sun, and that by his own act, must have been a trial indeed. But Gideon's faith stood the trial. Before God's clear command all his natural feelings and wishes gave way at once. He might have said with St. Paul, "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ;" for he acted in that self-same spirit. His faith prompted him to obey, at whatever sacrifice of inclination and natural desire. That places him on a very high pedestal among believers. But let us look again at the extraordinary singleness of eye with which Gideon's faith led him to act. The loss of the first 22,000 men was indeed a heavy one, but still they went away of their own free will. But the 10,000 who remained had given proof of a brave and constant spirit, and how could he put upon them the affront of sending them away, after a test of an arbitrary kind, as men unfit to face the enemy? It was now not Gideon's ambition only, not his *amour-propre*, which would rise in rebellion against a hard command, but his feelings as a soldier, as a comrade, as one who desired to retain the good opinion of his countrymen, and who wished to be popular amongst them. Dismiss the 9700 men who had left home, and were come to share the danger with him, and who had refused to leave him when they might have done so! Expose himself to the charge of fickleness and folly—to be thought like a man who builds a house and then plucks it down with his own hands; to be liable all his life to the hatred and resentment of those whom he had so affronted! (See 2 Chron. xxv. 10.) How could he obey such a hard command? But if Gideon's natural man spake thus, the voice of his faith spake in contradiction to such thoughts, and spake with authority. His faith still prompted him to obey, and he did obey, because he looked with a single eye to the will of God, and took no count of consequences to himself or others. Here again then his faith was of a very high quality.

II. THE RISKS OF FAITH. But we may look at Gideon's faith in a little different light, and mark the immense risks that he ran, having all human probabilities against him, and only the promise of God for him. Here was a vast host of 135,000 men within less than an hour's march of him. His position was anyhow one of the utmost danger. To weaken his force even by 1000 men must seem an act of great imprudence. To denude himself of his whole force except a handful of 300 men was like courting destruction, like putting his head in the lion's mouth. Humanly speaking, Gideon and his 300 would be crushed like insects under the feet of the Midianite host. And yet he deliberately reduced his force to 300 men, and then marched down from his stronghold into the enemy's camp. He set the word and promise of God on one side, and all the fearful risks and dangers on the other, and these last were in his eyes as nothing in comparison with the former. He went down with his 300 in full confidence of the victory which he won. In this too his faith was worthy of all praise and imitation.

III. VERIFICATION OF THE WORD OF GOD. But here perhaps a caution is necessary, lest we mistake what faith is. Faith is such an entire trust in the word of God that it produces obedience to that word, whatever it requires of us. But we must not mistake our own fancy, or our own wishes, or our own opinion, for the word of God. Had Gideon rushed down upon the Midianite host upon the impulse of his own courage, or in reliance on his own stratagem, or under an unfounded belief that God had sent him, instead of admiring his faith, we should have had perhaps to blame him for foolhardiness, or to accuse him of foolish vanity, or to pity him for his fanaticism. It was because his course was founded upon the clear and distinct word of God that it is held up to us as an object of admiration and imitation. And it is worth observing in this connection what abundant assurance was given to Gideon that the very word of God was his warrant for what he did, and how cautious Gideon was to obtain such assurance. The distinct appearance and words of the angel at first, his tarrying by the terebinth tree at Gideon's request, the fire which consumed the sacrifice at the touch of the angel's staff, the vanishing of the angel out of his sight, his reappearance that same night, the sign, twice repeated, of the fleece of wool, the reiterated communications by the word of the Lord, and the dream that he heard in the Midianite

camp are so many proofs upon proofs, like our Lord's appearances after his resurrection, given by God to make his revelation certain, and so many evidences of Gideon's wise caution in ascertaining beyond a doubt that it was the word of God which was directing him in this terrible enterprise. In trying to take Gideon's faith as a model of our own, we must first imitate his care in ascertaining what the word of God really does require of us. The sad mistakes that have been made by misguided men in all ages, confounding the passions of their own hearts, or the hallucinations of their own brains, with the requirements of the written word of God, and even in their heated fanaticism imagining that special revelations were made to them by the Holy Ghost, confirms the lesson, given us by Gideon, of not accepting anything as the word of God upon light or insufficient evidence. To accept as the word of God without sufficient evidence any impression, or impulse, or vision, or dream, or interpretation of Scripture, is not a proof of a strong faith, but an evidence of a weak, and rash, and credulous mind. We may place, therefore, as first in order of importance, as well as the first that rises to the surface from the history of Gideon, the lesson of taking all due care and caution in verifying the word of God. This implies, circumstanced as we are, diligent and prayerful study of Holy Scripture, so as to be imbued with its true spirit, and to know thoroughly what it requires of us under the various circumstances of life. But when once the requirements and meaning of the word of God are plain, then a true faith will obey it, in spite of any sacrifice of worldly interest or self-pleasing which such obedience may incur, and in spite of any risks of worldly evil which may ensue. And the reason is obvious. Faith rests upon the perfect goodness and infinite power of God. If once, therefore, we know that God commands us to do such or such a thing, or to leave such a thing undone, we are certain that it is really for our good to do it, however much appearances may be the other way. We are certain too that the power of God is sufficient to bear us harmless through all dangers, however insuperable they may seem to us. It is of the very essence of faith, therefore, to give more weight to the unseen power and love of God than to the visible losses and dangers which threaten to be the result of obedience to God's word, and to make light of sacrifice of worldly advantages, or of selfish interests, in view of that closer communion with God which comes of obedience to his commandments. So Gideon acted, so Abraham acted, and so Moses acted, and thus must we act if we would be reckoned with them. The sacrifices we are called to make and the risks we are called to run by a conscientious obedience to the word of God in all its breadth will probably be much smaller than theirs were; perhaps only the sacrifice of some gratification to our vanity, or some addition to our self-esteem, the risk of some loss to our gains, or some check to our haste to get rich; but every such sacrifice made in the spirit of a true faith, and every such risk run in simple trust to the promises of the word of God, will be accepted of God in his Fatherly love, and will help to make us rich in faith, and to secure our place among the heirs of that kingdom which God hath promised to them that love him.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 9—15.—*The crowning sign.* All through this drama the spirit of Gideon was being trained for a decisive service. His faith had been tried to the utmost. Alone of all that host had he borne the responsibility of reducing it to 300 men. God's influence upon Gideon was from beginning to end moral and spiritual.

I. GOD JUSTIFIES HIS WAYS TO THOSE WHO PUT THEIR TRUST IN HIM. It was a grace that this additional sign should be given. The patience and faith of the servant of God are recognised by a spiritual reward. The deep harmony, hitherto unsuspected, of the steps he had taken at the Divine instance with the process going on and assisted by God's influence in the minds of his enemies must have, when combined with the circumstances,—the still night, the darkness, the vast host in whose dangerous neighbourhood he lay,—produced a profound impression upon his mind. In such a revelation there is communion and spiritual rapture. It was a reward for all he had passed through. The wisdom of everything was plain. There are times like this in every true life. They come unexpectedly, as a grace from our heavenly Father. He leads us into his counsels, and confirms us. Obedience leads on to knowledge,

JUDGES.

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II. SUGGESTION IS GIVEN HOW TO PERFECT OUR SERVICE. In every saint's life there is something wanting—an indefinite incompleteness and crudity. Such revelations and providences remove this. Their practical utility is evident. Here were several matters made known to Gideon he had not probably dreamt of. 1. The carelessness of the watch, arising probably from the notion that Israel had disagreed and dispersed. 2. The liability of an army so composed, &c., to panic. 3. The influence of his own name (the use he made of this we know by the cry). 4. The secret fear in the hearts of his adversaries.

III. IT IS BY THE MORAL INFLUENCE OF GOD'S PEOPLE THE WORLD IS OVERCOME. Christians are too much afraid of the world. *Fear not*, says the Master, *for I have overcome the world*. Vivid realisations of this are sometimes afforded us. The whole stress of attention ought therefore to be laid upon character, obedience to God's will, and submission to his leadership. Though few and weak, the "little flock" will receive the kingdom. It is Christ in us of whom the wicked and the demons are afraid. Of what consequence all their multitude and array? Secretly the world respects and fears the self-denial and faith of Christians.

IV. A GRACIOUS REVELATION LIKE THIS HAS TO BE RECOGNISED ADORINGLY AND BY IMMEDIATE PRACTICAL OBEDIENCE. Gideon "worshipped" Jehovah. It was a time when every obstacle had been removed, and his way was clearly revealed. He could now sympathise with God and admire his consummate wisdom. For himself too he must have felt grateful. God was better to him than he had hoped. Victory was potentially his. No wonder that his heart poured itself forth in such unrestrained and adoring emotion. But the lesson of the sign was not lost. Practical advantage was at once taken of it. He "returned unto the host of Israel, and said, Arise," &c. Do not allow God's gracious revelations in our lives to be a dead letter. Act upon them, that our lives may be brought into subjection and harmony with his will.—M.

Vers. 15—22.—*Inspired tactics*. The strategy of Gideon is one of the military marvels of antiquity. It seems simple and well adapted to its end; but that did not appear at first. In truth he was taught of God, inspiring his mind and illuminating his common sense, his experience, and his spiritual faculties. From the "lamps, pitchers, and trumpets" we learn—

I. HOW THE ENEMIES OF GOD ARE TO BE DEALT WITH. 1. *The means to be employed are of Divine appointment*. Not what human wisdom would devise, nor as appealing to material aid. "Gideon overcame Midian with unarmed soldiers, bearing only trumpets, torches, and pitchers. So Christ overcame the world by unarmed apostles, bearing the trumpet of preaching and the torch of miracles" (Theodoret). 2. *Prompt and intelligent advantage is to be taken of the opportunities presented*. What served at this juncture would have been entirely useless at another time. Knowledge of men is of immense advantage to the Christian worker; tact, and perception of the capabilities of the several means of grace. The power of Christian truth can never be overrated, but it may be misapplied. 3. *Unity and co-operation should be shown by God's servants*. Nothing could be finer than the device, save the manner in which it was carried out. Greater works than these shall be done when all Christ's servants are of one heart and one mind.

II. IN WHAT LIGHT THEIR POWER IS TO BE REGARDED. Gideon began his enterprise with the conviction, which he communicated to his followers, "The Lord hath delivered into your hand the host of Midian." The victory is already potentially ours if we use the right means in the right spirit. All the pomp and influence of sin ought not to daunt us. It is a house divided against itself, and subject to a thousand alarms. The least saint, in God's strength, may put an "army of aliens" to flight.

III. UPON WHOM THE SOLDIER OF THE TRUTH OUGHT TO DEPEND. Gideon is filled throughout with a profound trust in Jehovah. It is that which gives the moral character to his plans. Although he saw how potent his own name was amongst the Midianites, he did not content himself with the war-cry, "The sword of Gideon," but preferred "The sword of the Lord (Jehovah) and of Gideon." Christians can rely implicitly upon spiritual means and methods, because they believe in God, who informs and directs all earnest effort. The Israelites stood still and the Lord fought for them.—M.

Ver. 22—ch. viii. 4, 10—13.—*Following up advantage.* A model of diplomatic skill, judicial sternness, and soldier-like hardihood and resolution. Far from home, amid hardship in strange regions, he tracks the enemy even into the inaccessible Hauran. There is a Syrian proverb, *He fled into the Wa'r of the Sāfa*, i. e. into an unassailable refuge.

I. THE CO-OPERATION IS SOUGHT OF ALL ISRAELITES WHO CAN BE OF HELP. He had reasons for keeping the glory to his own trusty band. But there is no selfishness in his disposition. The advantage of his nation and the glory of Jehovah is uppermost in his mind. He finds work, therefore, for all. All are engaged, that it may be a national victory. Some have to lay the foundations, begin the work, sow the seed; others can then carry out. The least Christian has something he can do. It is a duty of leaders to make and indicate fitting work for all. "The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few." Ephraim can do one part of the work best; he another. And having hitherto abstained, they were quite fresh now.

II. A SAGACIOUS AND KINDLY FORBEARANCE IS SHOWN TO THE JEALOUSIES OF BRETHREN. No word of rebuke is spoken to the tribes that held back. Persuasion is used, opportunity for usefulness is presented, the patriotism of the tribes is relied upon. It was no time for questions and wranglings. Well would it be for the different branches of Christ's Church did they follow a similar policy. Would that we were all so busy that we had no time for doctrinal disputes and questions of precedence and apostolic authority!

III. NO PAUSE OR REST IS OBSERVED UNTIL THE TASK IS COMPLETED. The deserted Midianite camp with all its riches does not tempt. Hunger and thirst and weariness are endured rather than lose the advantage. Only a determination to follow up the surprise with thorough and exemplary vengeance could have sustained him. So the conflict with sin and the world is to be conducted. Better to wear out than to rust out. Evil habits, unholy practices, false principles have to be tracked out to their last refuges and finally disposed of. It is harder work to live out Christianity than to be converted to it; harder work to follow out in detail, and into the practice and life of every day, the great doctrines of righteousness than to understand and explain them intellectually. There is a loud call for vigour, thoroughness, patient continuance in well-doing. The day is Christ's; let us make it wholly his.—M.

Vers. 16—18.—*Gideon's ruse.* I. THE ASSURANCE OF SUCCESS IS A HELP TOWARDS ATTAINING IT. Gideon had feared to attack the hosts of Midianites and Amalekites till he had discovered that they feared him; then he took courage and energy to devise the plan of victory. Too much diffidence is dangerous. Hope inspires with ingenuity as well as with courage; it is a brightness, an influence that enlivens thought. Therefore hope has its place in the first rank of Christian graces (1 Cor. xiii. 13). The promises of the Bible are not only comforting, they are inspiring. Our great encouragement should be that the powers of evil fear Christ and his army.

II. THOUGHT IS SOMETIMES MORE NEEDFUL THAN FORCE. Gideon's victory was a triumph of thought, of contrivance. The right disposition of our energies is more important than the mere sum of them. It would be well if Christians practised on behalf of the cause of Christ the same wisdom which men of the world display in business, in politics, &c., so far as this is not inconsistent with perfect honour (Luke xvi. 8). Christ requires us to be wise and harmless (Matt. x. 16). Dulness is not holiness. Intellectual gifts should be consecrated to God, not despised as unfit for his service. The diplomatist and the tactician may find work in the service of Christ. In mission work organisation, economy of strength, ingenious adaptation of means to ends should be carefully studied, and the gift of wisdom sought in addition to that of zeal.

III. MORAL INFLUENCE IS BETTER THAN PHYSICAL FORCE. Gideon had conquered before he had struck a blow. The dismay he created and the confusion this produced in the hostile camp secured him victory. Though we cannot be justified in descending to deception, we may aim at influencing others by thought and feeling rather than by direct physical means. Christianity is a triumph of ideas. It is a sign of intellectual and spiritual failure when the Church desires to effect by the aid of the law what she should have done by the influence of moral suasion, as in restraining immorality, &c.

IV. IGNORANCE IS WEAKNESS. The Midianites and Amalekites were ignorant of the number of Gideon's army, or they would not have been deceived. They were too self-confident to inquire, as Gideon had done, concerning their condition. Ignorance and superstition create imaginary foes. An evil conscience is quick to imagine danger (Prov. xxviii. 1). The terrors which surround us are worse in imagination than in reality. Darkness and ignorance make men their own worst enemies (ver. 22).—A.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER VIII.

Ver. 1.—*The men of Ephraim.* It is possible that the transfer of the birthright from Manasseh to Ephraim (Gen. xlviii. 13—19) may have produced some estrangement between the tribes. It is also possible that Ephraim, in view of their great tribal power, and the distinction conferred upon them by the judgeship of Joshua the son of Nun (Numb. xiii. 8), and the possession of his grave (Josh. xxiv. 30), may have grown haughty and domineering, and perhaps more disposed to rest upon their former glories than to embark in fresh undertakings. Anyhow Gideon did not consult them, nor ask their aid, in the first instance. Now that the war had been so successful, the men of Ephraim were much displeased at not having been consulted.

Ver. 2.—*What have I done, &c.* Gideon's character comes out splendidly in this answer. Humble and unassuming (ch. vi. 15, 36, note),

and indisposed to glory, he was willing to give the Ephraimites full credit for their share in the great victory; prudent, and a lover of his country, he saw the immense importance of union among themselves, and the danger of intestine divisions and discord, and so at once met Ephraim's taunts by the soft answer which turneth away wrath (Prov. xv. 1). *The grapes.* The insertion of the word *grapes*, which is not in the Hebrew, rather spoils the proverb. It would run better, The gleanings of Ephraim is better than the vintage of Abi-ezer. The word *vintage* sufficiently shows that the *gleaning* meant was a *gleaning* of grapes. Ephraim, who came in at the end of the fight, like the gleaner when the vintage is finished, had got more glory by the capture of Oreb and Zeeb than the Manassites, who had gone through the whole campaign. The passage above referred to in Isaiah (ch. x. 25) implies that a great slaughter of the Midianites took place at the rock of Oreb.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—3.—*The blindness of self-love.* Nobody admires pride, envy, jealousy, and petulance, when they see them pictured in the character and conduct of other men. Everybody, on the contrary, recognises the beauty of humility, gentleness, and forbearance, and admires self-control and patience under provocation, and the postponement of private feelings to the public good. How is it that we so often yield to the passions which we condemn in others, and so seldom and so imperfectly practise those graces of which we see the beauty and excellence? Lord, help us to put off the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and to put on the new man, which after thee is created in righteousness and true holiness. Help us to be what we approve, and to leave off in ourselves what we disapprove in others.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—9, 13—17.—*Dealing with obstructives.* Ephraim, Succoth, and Penuel. I. THEY OUGHT NOT TO BE SUFFERED TO INTERFERE WITH THE CHIEF ENDS AND PRESSING CLAIMS OF DIVINE SERVICE. Gideon hastens after the routed and retreating foe. The sullen apathy of Ephraim, the refusal of Succoth and Penuel to meet the demands of patriotism and humanity, do not turn him aside. When the last blow has been struck and the power of Midian is laid low he will return and mete out to each according to their deserts. This is an illustration of how side issues may often arise, and of the manner in which they are to be dealt with. It is seldom that the difficulties and oppositions of life, however annoying and restraining they may be, can utterly prevent the graver duties or excuse dilatoriness. Frequently the petty nature of the opposition is revealed by steadfast continuance in the path of duty, and solitary resolution. We must do what we can, leaving with others the responsibility

for their own conduct. The greatest workers in Christ's vineyard have had to labour and live on amidst misunderstanding, obloquy, and hindrance; but their work has been achieved nevertheless, and its moral effect has been all the greater.

II. WHEN THE PROPER TIME ARRIVES THEY MUST BE DEALT WITH ACCORDING TO THE NATURE AND DEGREE OF THE OPPOSITION. A wise discrimination is needed. Where gentleness will avail, harsh measures are to be avoided. Gideon knew the haughty character of Ephraim, the wound their ambitious spirit had sustained when the leadership was wrested from their hands, and so he exercised forbearance, and was gentle and pacific. Civil war was averted when it might have involved national ruin, and the generous side of Ephraim was appealed to. "A soft answer turneth away wrath." After all, Ephraim had atoned for past misbehaviour by the timely and effective service rendered even in the face of an unexplained misunderstanding. It is wise to credit our opponents with the best motives, and to speak gently and reasonably, abstaining from self-glorification. But where the hindrance had been a national crime and a violation of the first principles of humanity a different course was pursued. Here the functions of the judge were called into exercise. The punishment was stern and exemplary, but carefully meted out. Succoth and Penuel are visited with prompt and terrible recompense. But the princes and elders are punished, as being the chief culprits; the common people, who were helpless, were spared. All heresy and schism, unholiness of life, spiritual opposition, &c., is not to be regarded in the same light. Gentleness may win a brother. A little blame may rest with ourselves. Allowance is to be made for the failings of human nature. But we are to have no fellowship with the profane, the blasphemer, the unbeliever, &c. Difference of opinion may co-exist with real co-operation and fellowship.—M.

EXPOSITION.

Ver. 4.—*Came to Jordan.* The narrative goes back to ch. vii. 24, to follow up the personal history of Gideon, from which the writer had been diverted to relate the result of Gideon's message to the Ephraimites, which is told in vers. 24 and 25, and ch. viii. 1—3 (see ch. vii. 25, note; ii. 1—6, note).

Ver. 5.—*Succoth.* On the east side of Jordan, as appears plainly from the narrative in Gen. xxxiii. 17, 18; for we read there that Jacob journeyed from Mount Gilead to Mahanaim, thence to Penuel, and from Penuel to Succoth, so called from the *booths* or tabernacles which he made for his cattle; and that after leaving Succoth he came to the city of Shechem (called Shalem), "in the land of Canaan," showing that Succoth was not in the land of Canaan. In Josh. xiii. 27 we are also distinctly told that Succoth was in the trans-Jordanic tribe of Gad (which lay south of the Jabbok), in the valley of the Jordan, where its proximity to *Mahanaim* (vers. 26, 30) shows it to be the same place as Jacob's *Succoth*, which was also near the Jabbok (Gen. xxxii. 22). The identification of Succoth with any modern representative is very uncertain. Jerome mentions a trans-Jordanic place named *Socoth*, in the region of Beth-shan, or Scythopolis; and Burkhardt also mentions a place described by him as "the ruins of Sukkot," two hours from Byzan (Beth-shan), and on the east of Jordan. But this, as well as the

Sakht of Robinson and Van de Velde, on the west of Jordan, about ten miles south of Beth-shan, is too far north for the Succoth of Jacob, which is shown to be the same as the Succoth of Gideon by the connection of the latter with Penuel (ver. 8), and which, as above noticed, is shown to be the same as the Succoth of Josh. xiii. by its proximity to Mahanaim. We must await some further light before we can decide the exact position of Succoth.

Ver. 6.—*And the princes of Succoth, &c.* Nothing could be more selfish, cowardly, and unpatriotic, than the conduct of the chief men of Succoth. Instead of aiding Gideon in his gallant enterprise for the deliverance of his country, they refused even food to his weary followers, for fear of the possibility of incurring the anger of the Midianites in case Gideon should fail. Their conduct and that of the men of Penuel is perhaps one among many indications how little real union there was between the tribes on the opposite sides of the Jordan (see ch. v. 16, 17).

Ver. 7.—*I will tear your flesh, &c.* These words breathe a fierce and vindictive spirit; such, however, as cannot surprise us in the age and country of which we are reading (cf. vers. 9 and 21). The provocation, it must be allowed, was very great, but still the spirit was very different from that which dictated the prayer under far greater provocation, "Father, forgive them, for they know

not what they do." **Thorns of the wilderness.** The nature of the punishment here threatened, and the execution of which is related in ver. 16, is uncertain. The word here rendered *tear* means literally to *thresh*. Hence some suppose that the punishment here spoken of was a severe kind of capital punishment inflicted by threshing instruments with sharp iron points, called here "thorns of the wilderness," and "briers" (though some again understand literally *thorns and briers*); and they compare 2 Sam. xii. 31, where the word rendered *harrows* means *threshing instruments*, as also Isa. xxviii. 27; xli. 15. But others, as Bertheau, Keil, and Delitzsch, do not think it was a capital punishment at all, and take the word *thresh* figuratively in the sense of *punishing severely*, and think that literal thorns and thistles were the implements of punishment.

Ver. 8.—**He went up thence to Penuel.** When Jacob was returning from Padan-aram to Canaan he reached Penuel first, and Succoth afterwards (Gen. xxxii. 30; xxxiii. 17). Gideon, travelling in the opposite direction from Canaan, naturally reaches Succoth first, and Penuel afterwards. Going from Succoth to Penuel too, he *went up* out of the Jordan valley towards the mountains on the east. Penuel appears to have been a place of importance, since Jeroboam repaired its fortifications with a view of retaining his hold on trans-Jordanic Israel (1 Kings xii. 25). The *tower* here mentioned shows it was a strong place, but its exact situation is unknown.

Ver. 10.—**Karkor.** Or, rather, *the Karkor*. We are still on unknown ground. The situation assigned to it by Eusebius and

Jerome, as being the same as a castle called Carcaria, near Petra, is quite out of the question, as being greatly too far south. As an appellative it suggests the idea of a walled-in space (*kir* = a wall; *kir-kir* = a space walled all round; cf. the Latin *carcer*, a prison); possibly an enclosed sheep or cattle fold on a large scale (see Numb. xxxii. 36: "built . . . folds for sheep"), affording some protection to the Midianite soldiers.

Ver. 11.—**Gideon went up.** See ver. 8, note. Implying that his direction was eastward away from the Jordan valley. **Nobah** was in the half-tribe of Manasseh. Nobah, who gave his name to the city, which was before called *Kenath*, seems to have been of the family of Machir (Numb. xxxii. 42). **Jogbehah** was in the tribe of Gad (Numb. xxxii. 35). These two cities appear to have been on the eastern frontier of their respective tribes, but the exact site of them is utterly unknown. It is a conjecture that possibly *Kunawat* may be *Nobah*, retaining its ancient name of *Kenath*. East of these cities was the desert, inhabited by nomads dwelling in tents, where Karkor was, and where Zebah and Zalmunna had encamped out of reach, as they thought, of their pursuers. But Gideon, falling suddenly upon them, routed the host, and took the two kings prisoners (see Ps. lxxxiii. 11).

Ver. 12.—**He discomfited.** Rather, as in the margin, *he terrified*. Those who were not killed in the first onslaught, when "he smote the host," were so terrified that they fled without further resistance, and many probably escaped, as all Gideon's efforts were directed to the capture of the two kings.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 4—12.—**"Faint, yet pursuing."** We do wrong in looking to the Scriptures only for spiritual lessons; they teach us also lessons of conduct in the affairs of this life. And it is a matter of great moment that we should conduct ourselves well and wisely in all the business of life. That lessons of worldly wisdom are not beneath the scope of Holy Scripture the whole Book of Proverbs teaches us, as does Solomon's prayer (2 Chron. i. 10) for wisdom to rule well and judge rightly, and the whole body of the law of Moses. The biographies of remarkable men given in the historical books teach us the same thing if we would use them rightly. But the exaggerated habit of allegorising and spiritualising the Old Testament has somewhat interfered with their usefulness in this respect.

I. The lesson which this portion of Gideon's history seems to teach us is **THE VALUE OF PERSEVERANCE**; of doing thoroughly whatever we take in hand, of going through with it to the end, and not leaving off till it is completed. Joash king of Israel was rebuked by Elisha the prophet on his death-bed because he only smote upon the ground thrice, and then stayed, satisfied with an imperfect result. The example of Gideon shows us one who was not satisfied with imperfect results, who had formed a complete conception of what he had to do, and did it. He was not stopped in his career by either successes or difficulties. True, he had driven the children of the east across the Jordan. There had been a great slaughter at the rock Orch, the kings were fugitives, the power of Midian was broken. Some might think enough had been

done. But Gideon no doubt had the future as well as the present moment in view. The wrongs and misery of his country during the Midianite oppression, seven long years of grinding, cruel servitude, were fresh in his memory. He would not have the plain of Jezreel again the prey to those locusts from the east. And so Midian must be crushed. But could his strength and the strength of his 300 hold out any longer? The long and hurried march, the hand-to-hand fights, the heat, their hunger and thirst, the weight of their arms, which they had doubtless taken in lieu of the pitchers and trumpets, had nearly exhausted their powers; even their own countrymen would not help them; they were weary and faint; might they not now stop and rest? No, their work was not complete; so, though faint, they must still pursue. Methinks that as we read this stirring tale of energy and perseverance we must feel ashamed of our own faint-heartedness; we must feel rebuked at our own readiness to succumb to hindrances, or to be content with half successes; we must resolve that we will put a little more energy into our own daily work, or extraordinary tasks, and that, in spite of weariness and discouragement, in the face of hindrances and opposition, we will persevere and carry through to the end whatever work we have in hand, of which we are convinced that it is right to do it. This is the first lesson given to us by Gideon—faint, yet pursuing.

II. But we may no doubt also spiritualise the lesson, AND APPLY IT TO OUR SPIRITUAL WARFARE, AND TO THE STRUGGLES OF THE SOUL FOR THE MASTERY OVER SIN. Here the importance of doing our work thoroughly, and persevering, in spite of successes and hindrances alike, till our task is complete, is certainly not less than in the affairs of this life. In resisting temptations, in resolutely subduing fleshly lusts and unruly appetites which war against the soul, in determined self-conquests, in perfecting holiness in the fear of God, in encountering the opposition of the world, and the contradictions of sinners, and the wiles and assaults of the devil, we must expect to be often faint. It is so easy to give up the struggle, to be content with imperfect results, to seek for rest and ease in giving up the close pursuit which we had begun. But this is not the spirit of Gideon. If we would be in our spiritual warfare such as he was in his conflict against his earthly foes, even when we are faint and weary we must be still pursuing; we must persevere to the end, and never slack our hands nor rest our feet till we have gained a complete and final victory through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. To him be glory for ever.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 4.—“*Faint, yet pursuing.*” A splendid and really *forced* march. Humanly speaking, it was the real battle. The grandest qualities were called forth, and the greatest results secured. A picture of the Christian life.

I. GOD OFTEN SUFFERS HIS SERVANTS TO ENDURE HARDSHIP IN DOING HIS WILL.

II. THOSE WHO ARE DOING IMPORTANT SERVICE UNDER CIRCUMSTANCES OF HARDSHIP OUGHT TO BE ENCOURAGED AND SUPPORTED.

III. DUTY AND THE HIGH CALLING OF CHRISTIANS OUGHT TO TRIUMPH OVER WEAKNESS, HARDSHIP, AND OPPOSITION.

IV. THE GREATEST RESULTS OFTEN DEPEND UPON PERSISTENCY EVEN AMIDST DISADVANTAGES.—M.

Ver. 4.—“*Faint, yet pursuing.*” The faintness of Gideon's troops may illustrate the spiritual faintness of Christians, and the influence of this on their conduct in life.

I. FAINTNESS MAY OVERTAKE US WHILE PURSUING THE CHRISTIAN COURSE. 1. Note the *characteristics* of this faintness. It is (1) loss of strength, so that we are not able to attain so much nor to progress so fast as we should otherwise do; (2) a sense of distress, making every movement a pain, and robbing the Christian life of its bright hopefulness and cheerful enthusiasm. 2. Note the *existence* of this faintness in the pursuit of the Christian course. Though still pursuing the right way, we may experience faintness. It is not the deviation to bye-path meadow alone which brings distress. We may grow weary *in* well doing (Gal. vi. 9). Therefore (1) let us not be over confident because we are in the right, and (2) let us not be dismayed at the experience of faintness, as though this were a sign of spiritual defection.

3. Note the *causes* of this faintness. (1) These may be observed in the *circumstances* of life:—in the length of the course; the great difficulty being not to nerve ourselves for a few heroic actions, but to continue pressing on through the long hot day, through the long weary night:—in the speed of the pursuit; life is a race swift and stern, and the difficulty often is to overtake the duties which accumulate so fast that those who, so to say, “take things easily” must always find themselves behindhand:—in the impediments of the way, leading through tangled thickets of prejudice and error, and up craggy heights of noble attainments. (2) The causes of faintness may also be traced to our own *habit* and *condition*: such as want of nourishment—the soul which is always working, and does not seek renewed strength in spiritual feeding upon the bread of life, in prayer, in the reading of Scripture, in meditation, in communion with Christ, will surely grow faint; want of rest—there is a spiritual insomnia, a habit of restless activity, which invariably results in faintness. Christ required rest, and called his disciples apart to rest (Mark vi. 31).

II. FAINTNESS NEED NOT STAY US IN THE PURSUIT OF THE CHRISTIAN COURSE. Though the troops of Gideon were faint, they still pursued. 1. *Faintness is not death*. If our strength is slight, this is a good reason for making the best use of it. If faintness reduce our talents to one, we have no excuse to bury that one. 2. God expects our *attainments to be no more than proportionate to our strength*. He knows our weakness (Ps. ciii. 14). He is no hard task-master, expecting us to make bricks without straw; so we need not despair of pleasing God because our faintness permits of but slight service. 3. The real source of victory is *not our strength, but God's might*. When we are most faint, God's strength made perfect in our weakness may be most effective (2 Cor. xii. 9). The little one may chase a thousand, because God is with him. When we are most faint we are least self-confident, and in our humility and helplessness driven to the mighty for strength, so that our faintness may be the means of leading us to the real strength which alone can accomplish great things. 4. *Faintness can be overcome*. Faintness is not necessarily the precursor of death. It may be but temporary. We may find in God a sure remedy for spiritual faintness, because “they that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength” (Isa. xl. 31). 5. If we are faithfully pressing on in spite of present faintness, we shall be rewarded with *future rest and triumph*. Gideon's troops were well recompensed for their brave pursuit. The short race of life will end in a haven of rest, in a home of honour. Let us then be brave and true, remembering that in proportion to the weariness of present toil will be the sweetness of future rest (2 Cor. iv. 16—18).—A.

EXPOSITION.

Ver. 13.—**Before the sun was up.** There is a wonderful diversity in the renderings of this verse. Some of the old versions and Jewish Rabbis interpret it *before sunset*. Many of the best Jewish commentators, however, understand the phrase as the A. V. does—“Before the going up of the sun,” i. e. before sunrise; supposing Gideon's attack on the Midianitish camp to have been a night attack, and Succoth to have been so near to Karkor that he was able to reach it by sunrise. But others say that the word here rendered *sun* (*heres*) is only used in poetry, and that the word rendered *up* is never used of sunrise, but, as in the phrase “the going up of Akabbim” (ch. i. 36), of an ascent up a hill. They therefore take *heres* as a proper name, and translate “from the going up of Heres.” Others again, by an almost imperceptible change in the last letter, read “the mountains” instead of *heres*. But the A. V. may be well defended, and

gives an excellent sense. In ch. xiv. 18 the same word for the *sun* is used in the very similar phrase, “before the sun went down.” In Gen. xix. 15 the phrase, “the morning arose,” has the verb from which the word here rendered *up* is derived; and a note of time here exactly suits the context. It marks the celerity of Gideon's movements that he was actually on his way back to Succoth at sunrise, after having routed the Midianites and taken their two kings prisoners.

Ver. 14.—**He described.** Rather, *he wrote down*, i. e. gave him a list of the princes and elders.

Ver. 15.—**The men of Succoth.** Meaning the princes and elders.

Ver. 16.—**He taught,** i. e. corrected, punished. It is, however, very probable that the true reading is *he threshed* or *tore* (*yadash* for *yadah*, the final letters *sh* and *y* being very similar). We have then the fulfil-

ment of Gideon's threat in ver. 7 recorded in the same words with regard to Succoth, just as the *breaking down* of the tower of Peniel in ver. 17 is in verbal agreement with ver. 9. The Septuagint and Vulgate both seem to have found *he threshed* in their copies.

Ver. 17.—*He slew the men of the city.* This makes it probable that the *threshing* of the men of Succoth was a capital punishment, as there is no reason why the men of Peniel should be more severely punished than the men of Succoth.

Ver. 18.—*What manner of men, &c.* An incident not before related is here brought to light, viz., that on some unknown occasion, possibly as soon as the rising of the Israelites under Gideon became known, or when, as related in ch. vi. 2, they had sought to hide themselves in Mount Tabor, but had been caught, Zebah and Zalmunna had put to death Gideon's brothers. We may observe in passing how characteristic this is of a true narrative in which everything that happened cannot possibly be related (see ch. x. 11, 12, note). The word here rendered *what manner of*, i. e. *of what sort*, means, in every other place in which it occurs, *where?* and the sense of *what sort* is only inferred from the answer, *As thou art, so were they.* But it is not safe thus to change the universal meaning of a common word. It is better to take the words of Gideon, *Where are the men whom ye slew at Tabor?* as an upbraiding of them for the murder of his brethren, and a threat that where they were their murderers would soon

be. The answer of Zebah and Zalmunna, which is not given in its entirety, was no doubt intended to be soothing and deprecatory of Gideon's wrath. They pleaded the necessity they were under in self-defence to slay them; they were men of such royal stature and prowess that their own lives would have been in danger had they spared them. But Gideon turned a deaf ear to their plea. He must avenge the death of his own brothers, his own mother's sons. He would have spared them as prisoners of war (2 Kings vi. 22), but he must do his part as *goel* or *avenger* (Numb. xxxv. 12). Observe the stress laid on their being not merely his father's sons by another wife, but his own mother's sons, a much more tender relation (cf. Pa. l. 20).

Ver. 20.—*He said unto Jether, &c.* These marks of savage life are painful to contemplate in such a man as Gideon. But it is well for us to be made aware how the best and greatest men cannot rise above the manners and received maxims of their age; and it teaches us to make due allowance for the faults of uncivilised men with whom we have to do, whether Afghans, or Zulus, or others.

Ver. 21.—*The ornaments.* Literally, *little moons*, crescent-shaped ornaments of gold and silver, which as well as "chains" (ver. 26) were hung as ornaments on their camels' necks (cf. ch. v. 30). It would seem from ver. 26 that the kings themselves also wore these ornaments; and in Isa. iii. 18 they are enumerated among the articles of female attire—*round tires like the moon*, A. V.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 13—21.—*The complete revenge.* If any man ever stood on the very apex of success and triumph, it was Gideon on his return from the pursuit of the Midianites. He had saved his country; he had set a whole people free from a foreign yoke; he had restored the worship of the true and living God in his native land, and uprooted a vile and debasing idolatry; he was the conqueror of a vast host with most inadequate means; he had subdued and taken prisoners two powerful kings; he had avenged the death of his own brothers upon those who, in pride and wantonness, had slain them; and he had chastised the insolent, cowardly, and unpatriotic conduct of his own countrymen who, at his time of greatest need, had insulted instead of helping him; and he stood in the proud position of having undertaken an almost impossible task, and having succeeded beyond his utmost expectation. But in the very height of this success we seem to see an overbalancing towards a fall. It is very slight; there was still a wonderful moderation of mind (as seen in vers. 22, 23); but the weak human heart had a stronger draught of success than it could bear. As long, indeed, as his eye was quite single, and it was only the glory of God that he sought, and the welfare of his country, all went well (see ver. 2). But Gideon was not perfect. Had he been without the pride of fallen humanity, he would not have slain the captive kings, he would not have put to death the insolent men of Succoth and Peniel, richly as they deserved punishment. But it is here that we seem to see the first clouding of the singular brightness of Gideon's disinterested zeal. When we have made every allowance for the customs and opinions of the age,

we cannot help feeling that something different from zeal and love for God was at work within him when he took away those lives. Zebah and Zalmunna had slain *his* brothers, and so had done an injury to *him*, and put a slight upon *him*; the men of Succoth and Penuel had taunted and affronted *him*, they had undervalued his power, they had taken advantage of his momentary weakness to put him to shame. He must have his revenge. In his hour of more than human greatness the littleness of humanity started into birth. It was no doubt true that the law of the avenger of blood justified the slaughter of the kings, and the base conduct of the Succothites and Penuelites would secure a universal acquiescence in the justice of their punishment. But still we cannot help seeing that the pride of self, albeit unperceived by Gideon, had a hand in these actions, which cast a distinct shade upon Gideon's shining path, and which we cannot read of even at this distance of time without a pang of regret. How glad we should be if that noble spirit, in the very flush of victory, had risen sufficiently above the spirit of his age and above his own anger to spare his prostrate foes; and if in the height of his glory he had despised the meanness of the men of Succoth, and left them to the punishment of their own shame, and the contempt of their fellow-men! (see 2 Sam. xix. 23). But it could not be. And perhaps the lesson of human weakness is more valuable to us as it is; for it leaves us a warning not to seek a *complete revenge* for ourselves under any circumstances, but to be content to commit our cause to God: and that it is better for man to be thwarted and humiliated than to have everything his own way. He cannot bear it.

EXPOSITION.

Vers. 22, 23.—**Rule thou, &c.** The gratitude of Israel to their great deliverer, added to a sense that it would be for their own security, and to a desire, already perhaps beginning to be felt, to be like the nations around them (1 Sam. viii. 5), naturally led to the offer, "Rule thou over us." But the time predicted by Moses (Deut. xvii. 14, 15) was not yet come. And so Gideon returned an answer replete with moderation and piety: "I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: the Lord shall rule over you" (cf. 1 Sam. viii. 7; x. 19; xii. 12).

Ver. 24.—**I would desire a request of you.** Again human weakness breaks out in this great man, and we seem to see the effect of great prosperity in stirring up selfish desires in his heart. It was perhaps not without significance that mention was made in ver. 21 of his taking the ornaments that were on the camels' necks in connection with the slaughter of the kings. Anyhow we have now a second instance of a love of spoil. It seems to have been a national custom with the Ishmaelites, among whom the Midianites are reckoned (see Gen. xxxvii. 25—28), to wear golden rings; hence when they came to strip the slain there was a vast booty of gold rings. These Gideon asked for as his share, and the people readily agreed to the request. **Ear-rings.** The word is singular in Hebrew, which agrees with its more proper signification of *nose-ring*, an ornament often worn by both men and women in the East. Gesenius mentions having seen at Leipsic some Indian dancing women with *nose-rings*.

It is distinctly marked as a *nose-ring* in Gen. xxiv. 22, 30, 47, because in the last verse Abraham's servant says that he "*put the ring (han-nezem) upon her nose*" (*face*, A.V.). Again, in Ezek. xvi. 12 the Hebrew is, "*I placed a ring upon thy nose*" (I put a jewel upon thy forehead, A.V.). So also Job xlii. 11, "*one ring of gold*," implies that it was a *nose-ring*, and not an *ear-ring*. In other passages, however, as Gen. xxxv. 4; Exod. xxxii. 2, it is expressly said that these rings were worn in the ears; while in others, again, there is nothing to mark whether they were worn in the ears or in the nose, as Prov. xxv. 12; Hosea ii. 13, except that in the latter passage the singular number in the Hebrew is more favourable to the *nose-ring* than to the *ear-rings*, as the A.V. translates it. It is thought by many, with some probability, that the *nose-ring* did not pierce the gristle of the nose, but hung down upon the nose from a fillet round the forehead. In every case they were of gold.

Ver. 25.—**A garment.** Rather, *the cloak*. Probably Gideon's military cloak (see Isa. ix. 5), which lay in his tent ready for use as a cloak by day or a coverlet by night (Deut. xxii. 17).

Ver. 26.—**A thousand and seven hundred shekels**—equal to about fifty pounds weight, and probably to above £3000 worth of our money, reckoning a shekel of gold at £1 16s. 6d. If the rings, like that given to Rebekah (Gen. xxiv. 22), weighed each half a shekel, they would be the spoil of 3400 dead bodies. If they each weighed less it would of course

imply a larger number of slain. **The ornaments**, as in ver. 21, *the collars*. The word so rendered seems rather to mean *drops* or *pendants*. When worn by women (Isa. iii. 19, *chains*, A.V.) they were often of single pearls. The **purple raiment**, the famous Tyrian purple, made from the juice of a shell-fish which is found in the Mediterranean, which was the distinctive colour of royal and imperial raiment. **Chains**. Perhaps the ornaments mentioned in ver. 21 as on the camels' necks were suspended to these chains. In Cant. iv. 9 the *chain* is mentioned as an ornament of a woman's neck; in Prov. i. 9 of a man's neck. Many interpreters understand these last-mentioned articles as not being part of Gideon's spoil, but being the people's portion. But it seems much more probable that the spoil of the kings should be Gideon's portion, as indeed ver. 21 implies. It is best, therefore, to take all these articles as being the property of the kings, and to understand the writer to tell us that Gideon had the rings, which were the people's spoil, in addition to all the spoil which naturally fell to his own share.

Ver. 27.—**Gideon made an ephod thereof**. There is great difference of opinion among commentators as to the significance of this statement. The ephod (Exod. xxviii. 4, 6—30) was that part of the high priest's dress (1 Sam. xiv. 3; xxi. 9) which covered the breast in front, and the upper part of the back behind, the two parts being clasped together by two large onyx stones, one on each shoulder, and kept together by the curious girdle, just above which was fastened the breastplate of judgment. In a modified form the "linen ephod" was worn by all priests; but it was especially worn by the high priest when he inquired of God by Urim and Thummim (1 Sam. xxiii. 9; xxx. 7). Hence it was also connected with idolatrous worship, as we see by ch. xvii. 5, and Hosea iii. 4, being probably used for purposes of divination, as we know that idolatrous kings of Israel, instead of inquiring of the Lord, inquired of the false gods (2 Kings i. 2, 3). What, then, was Gideon's purpose in making this costly ephod? We may infer from his proved piety that at all events his intention was to do honour to the Lord, who had given him the victory. Then, as he was now at the head of the State, though he had declined the regal office, and as it was the special prerogative of the head of the State to "inquire of the Lord" (Numb. xxvii. 21; 1 Sam. xxi. 13; xxiii. 2, 4, &c.; xxviii. 6, &c.), he may have thought it his right, as well as a matter of great importance to the people, that he should have the means ready at hand of inquiring of God. His relations with the great tribe of Ephraim may have made it inconvenient to go to Shiloh to consult the

high priest there, and therefore he would have the ephod at his own city of Ophrah, just as Jephthah made Mizpeh his religious centre (ch. xi. 11). Whether he sent for the high priest to come to Ophrah, or whether he made use of the ministry of some other priest, we have no means of deciding. The people, however, always prone to idolatry, made an idol of the ephod, and Gideon, either because it was a source of gain or of dignity to his house, or thinking it was a means of keeping the people from Baal-worship (ver. 33), seems to have connived at it. This seems to be the explanation best supported by the little we know of the circumstances of the case. **A snare**, i. e. as in ch. ii. 3, that which leads a person to eventual destruction. See Exod. x. 7, where Pharaoh's servants say of Moses, *How long shall this man be a snare unto us?* See also Exod. xxiii. 33; xxxiv. 12; Deut. vii. 16; 1 Sam. xviii. 21, &c. Observe in this verse how the narrative runs on far beyond the present time, to return again at ver. 28 (see note to ch. ii. 1—6; vii. 25; viii. 4).

Ver. 28.—**Lifted up their heads no more**. Thus showing the wisdom of Gideon's perseverance in pushing on his victory to completeness (see Homiletics on ch. viii. 4—12). The narrative goes back to ver. 26, or perhaps rather to ver. 21.

Vers. 30—32.—**Gideon had threescore and ten sons, &c.** This notice helps us to fill up the picture of Gideon's state after the Midianitish victory. He had indeed nobly refused the kingdom, as a Pericles would have refused to be tyrant of Athens. But he did not return to poverty and obscurity, as L. Q. Cincinnatus, in the Roman legend, returned to his plough after his victory over the Volscians. He was judge over Israel for forty years, with a household and a harem like a great prince, living in his paternal city, with the ephod set up there, himself the centre round which the powers of Church and State gathered; directing the affairs of his country, both civil and ecclesiastical, with eminent success, so that the country was at peace for forty years (a peace as long as that which followed the battle of Waterloo), and the detestable Baal-worship was effectually suppressed. And having lived in wealth and honour, he died in peace, and was buried in the sepulchre of his father at Ophrah in a good old age. He remains to us as one of the most remarkable characters of the Old Testament, not indeed without faults and blemishes, and not wholly unspoiled by prosperity, but still a great man, and an eminent servant of God.

Ver. 31.—**Whose name he called**. This is badly translated; it should be, *he gave him the name of Abimelech*—literally, *he set his name Abimelech*. There are two phrases in

Hebrew. The one, *he called his name* Seth, Noah, Ishmael, Isaac, Esau, Jacob, &c., as the case may be. And this is the phrase always, though not exclusively (see, *e. g.*, Gen. xxxv. 10; ch. vi. 32), used of the name given to a child at its birth or circumcision. The other is, *he gave or set him the name*, or, *he gave or set his name so-and-so*, and this phrase is only used of additional names, or surnames given later in life. The examples are ch. xiii. 31; 2 Kings xvii. 34; Neh. ix. 7; Dan. i. 7; v. 12. The inference is that the name of *Abimelech*, which means *father of a king*, and was the name of the royal family of Gerar, was given to Abimelech as a significant surname, and was

perhaps one of the causes which induced him to seize the kingdom. A third phrase is found in 2 Kings xxiii. 34; xxiv. 17; 2 Chron. xxxvi. 4: *he turned his name to Jehoiakim; changed his name to Zedekiah*. The Hebrew is the same in all these passages.

Ver. 33.—*And it came to pass, &c.* Cf. ch. ii. 11, 12, 19; iii. 7; iv. 1; v. 1; x. 6; xiii. 1. *Baal-berith*. See ch. ii. 13, note. He was like the *Zeus* *Ὁρκιος* of the Greeks, the god of covenants.

Ver. 35.—*Neither showed they kindness, &c.* Forgetfulness of God is often the parent of ingratitude to men. The heart of stone which is not touched by the love of Christ is also insensible to the kindness of man.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 22—35.—*Prosperity*. God has two ways of trying men: one in the furnace of affliction, that the trial of their faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, may be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ; the other in the fining-pot of prosperity, and this is much the harder trial of the two. Affliction tends to humble and soften and subdue; but in prosperity, self-esteem, self-reliance, self-satisfaction, self-will, pride, and security, are prone to spring up with a rank luxuriance. Disregard for the rights and feelings of others strengthens with the inordinate estimate of the regard due to a man's self. The Scripture lessons as to the dangers of prosperity, and the snare which the possession of unbounded power is to men in general, are very many and very striking, culminating in our Saviour's saying, "A rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. xix. 23). The latter part of David's reign compared with the first part of his life, the latter part of Solomon's contrasted with the beginning, Uzziah (2 Chron. xxvi. 16), Joash king of Judah (2 Chron. xxiv. 22), Amaziah after his successful campaign in Edom (2 Chron. xxv. 14—16), even good Hezekiah (2 Chron. xxxii. 27—31), all teach us the danger of prosperity, and the inability of the human heart to drink a full cup of success without intoxication. If we turn to secular history it is still the same story. Men of diverse characters and temperaments have all alike deteriorated under the influence of too much success in life, and shown themselves unfit to be trusted with unlimited power. Nebuchadnezzar, Alexander the Great, Nero, Constantine, Charlemagne, Louis Quatorze, Napoleon Buonaparte, men of the most different characters, may all be cited as having shown in different ways and degrees how hard it is for man to pass through the fining-pot of prosperity without bringing to light more or less the dross of a corrupt heart. It is an interesting and instructive inquiry how far Gideon passed through this fining-pot uninjured, and with his religious character undimmed. We have already glanced (Homiletics, ch. viii. 13—21) at the brilliancy of Gideon's success, and at the great qualities by which, under God, he obtained it. We had occasion too (Homiletics, ch. vii. 9—25) to notice the singular strength and perfectness of Gideon's faith, and the excellent fruits which it bore in practice. The humility and simplicity of purpose displayed by him, the docility and trustful obedience, the entire surrender of himself into the hands of God, without a thought for himself or a fear of the result, which marked his course, were of the highest calibre of human excellence guided and informed by the Holy Spirit of God. It is not, as we have already seen (Homiletics, ch. viii. 13—21), till his wonderful victory was consummated by the capture of the two kings that we can see any flaw in his character at all. The fining-pot had not yet begun to do its work. But when we come to the incident of the severe punishment of the men of Succoth and Penuel, to the slaughter in cold blood of the captive kings, and the plunder of their spoils, even when we have made every allowance for the manners and opinions of the times, and given due weight to the circumstances of the case, it is impossible not to feel that certain dormant passions of pride, and

resentment of injuries, and "insolent joy," born of overmuch prosperity, had been aroused by his successes. His request for the gold rings which formed a portion of the people's prey and the making therewith a costly ephod, without any direction from God or knowledge that he was doing what would be acceptable to him, showed a presumption far removed from the trustful docility which had been so beautiful a feature in his previous conduct; and we see a departure from the simplicity of his early life in his many wives and concubines, and in his connivance at the irregular concourse of the Israelites to Ophrah for a semi-idolatrous worship before the ephod, which conduced to his own worldly dignity, and was perhaps a source of emolument to him. These things are undoubtedly blots in Gideon's fame. On the other hand, his pious moderation in refusing the hereditary kingdom offered to him, the persistent "goodness which he showed to Israel" to his life's end, as we may safely conclude from the last verse of the chapter, the good government by which he gave rest to the land for forty years, and the continued repression of Baal-worship as long as he lived, are all evidences that he maintained his integrity before God, and never forfeited his claim to be a servant of God; and it is in entire agreement with this view that we read that he "died in a good old age, and was buried in the sepulchre of Joash his father," words by which the sacred historian evidently means to set before us the picture of one who, under God's favour, was happy in his death, as he had been in his life. Nor can we doubt for a moment what it was which held him up in the slippery path of worldly greatness. If God left him, as he did Hezekiah, "to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart," he did not leave or forsake him wholly. The faith in God which had carried him down to the Midianite camp, though it may have been dimmed, was never extinct. The communion with God, if less fresh and less constant, was never wholly interrupted. His belief that God is, and that he is a rewarder of them that seek him, once so deeply graven upon his heart and confirmed by his experience, never, we may be sure, departed from him. "Faint, yet pursuing," may probably describe the warfare of his soul at the most unfavourable times of his life. For ourselves, let us rise from the contemplation of Gideon's career with the firm determination to shake off those things which may be a snare to us, and not to slacken our pace in the pursuit of those things which are above. It is by constant prayer that our faith must be kept alive; it is by resolute resistance to those manifold lusts which war against the soul that our spirit must be kept free for holy obedience, and the eye of our mind kept clear to discern between the precious and the vile. We must keep a close watch against the first buds of those sinful dispositions in our hearts which are stimulated into growth by objects of carnal desire, or by wrongs or insults or taunting words, and we must nip them in the bud by crucifying the flesh with its affections and lusts. And if we find ourselves prosperous in this world, if riches increase, if friends multiply, if all goes well with us, if the world smiles upon us, if we are rising in consequence, in power, in the estimation of men, if new sources of gratification are opened to us, and life puts on its gayest, gaudiest colours for us, then above all it behoves us to be on our guard, and to maintain the supremacy of the love of God within us. Then let us humble ourselves before the cross of Christ; then let us bring the glories of the kingdom in full view, till the glories of earth pale before them; then let us strive more earnestly than ever to feel how immeasurably the pleasure of doing the will of God rises above the pleasure of pleasing ourselves, and how far the happiness of obedience to God's law transcends the happiness of yielding to our own desires. Such a victory over ourselves will be far more glorious than the conquest of ten thousand Midianites, and ours will be a richer booty than the richest spoils of kings.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 22—27.—*Noble self-abnegation.* The whole situation naturally described. In the flush of victory the impulse is to honour Gideon, and secure a permanent connection with the glory of his name by establishing a hereditary monarchy in his family. This honour he refuses. We have here—

I. **GENEROUS BUT MISTAKEN GRATITUDE.** It was a natural impulse in the soldiers.

But their mistake was twofold—(1) in exalting man instead of God, and (2) in seeking to put an end to the theocracy. The natural mind acts always thus, in the face of the plainest signs of Divine intervention and authority; building itself out from the Unseen by human authorities and institutions. The chain of connection with God is weakened by lengthening it. The plainest commands of God are disobeyed in mistaken self-interest. The human agent is depended upon because the perception of the Divine is weak. Exalting one of themselves was but a species of self-glorification. The motive of Gideon too is misunderstood.

II. DISINTERESTED SERVICE. The honour is refused. If prudence aided the decision, it was chiefly due to unaffected faith and reverence for Jehovah. He may have felt that his "might" and success were solely individual, and due to direct inspiration; and the incapacity and disagreements of his children may have already betrayed themselves. He thereby vindicates his own patriotism and disinterestedness. His humility and magnanimous loyalty to God as only Sovereign for Israel outshine all his exploits. 1. How hard it is for men to believe in the disinterestedness of benefactors! 2. God, who imparts might and inspiration, can also purify the heart from worldly ambitions and weaknesses.

III. DEVOUT RECOGNITION OF DIVINE AID AND AUTHORITY. The ephod is explained and described in Exod. xxviii. It is the priestly garment, with breastplate attached to it, worn in the sanctuary. The Urim and Thummim were also used in connection with it for oracular consultation. It meant, therefore, a tabernacle and its service wherever it was placed. 1. So far as this was to the honour of God and commemoration of his mercy, it was a pious act. 2. By using the spoils of the people for its construction, a national sacrifice was effected. 3. But by placing it in Ophrah he encouraged schism, gave his own family undue importance, and tempted his countrymen to superstitious practices.—M.

Vers. 24—27.—*The mistake of a good man.* I. ORIGINATING IN MOTIVES FOR THE MOST PART NOBLE AND HONOURABLE. (1) Desirous of a national testimony to God's gracious deliverance, and a commemoration of it to future ages, he (2) persuades the Israelites to make a national offering, and (3) increases the means of grace in his own district.

II. REFLECTING THE DEFECTS OF HIS CHARACTER AND BETRAYING ITS LATENT VICE. In his zeal for the religious reformation of Israel he did not sufficiently consider the bearings of the step he had taken. It was a hasty and crude expedient, from which greater experience or sage advice, or, above all, God's Spirit, would have saved him. And therein lay the root of the mischief. He relied on his own wisdom, and forgot to ask God's guidance. In getting to look upon himself as in a special sense the re-introducer of the Jehovah-worship, and the exponent of the mind of Jehovah, he forgot that it was only as he was taught of God that he could be preserved from error. Of all inventions, religious ones are to be most carefully scrutinised. And in the background of this assumption there lay a secret tendency to self-esteem because of his spiritual endowments and character, and the great achievements of the past. Pride because of his own humility—is it not a failing that many have shared? By this mistake he sowed the seeds of grave evils: schism, superstition, hero-worship. But—

III. THE SUBSTANTIAL GOOD DONE WAS NOT WHOLLY DESTROYED. Whilst he lived—a quiet, steadfast, righteous life—the people observed the true worship of Jehovah. His own example was a guide and a deterrent. And when at his death superstition ran riot, and the old licentious idolatry flowed back in an obliterating wave over the land and the institutions of Jehovah's worship, there were some things that could not be destroyed, remaining as germ ideas in the spiritual consciousness of Israel—the immediate obligation of the moral law upon every one, the direct responsibility of every one to God, and faith in the personal help of Jehovah. (1) God superintends the development of his truth, and (2) restrains the evil that mingles with the good in men's works.—M.

Vers. 29—32.—*The after life.* It is interesting to watch the after life of great men. In some it is a continual progress, in others a growing weakness of character and faculty. Gideon's was—

I. A REWARD AND CONSEQUENCE OF FAITHFUL SERVICE TO JEHOVAH. Long life, quietness, prosperity, honour.

II. KEPT ON THE WHOLE RIGHT, AND MADE A BLESSING BY THE GRACE OF GOD. He had begun well. His youth was a consecrated one; his old age was its true outcome. And yet not by natural virtue, but by the blessing of God.

III. CONTAINING THE GERMS OF NATIONAL EVILS. He was not ever on the heights of spiritual excitement. Perhaps his was a nature that required great difficulties to be surmounted in order to keep it right. At any rate he fails to rise above the laxities of his age, and he enters into connection with the Canaanites. How much too of his after-life could be explained as a living on the memory of a glorious past, and a growing estimation of the part he himself had played. The ephod, the natural son by the Canaanitish woman, the conflicting interests of the many heirs to his influence and renown—these were the occasions of untold evil.—M.

Vers. 33—35.—*The consequence of the imperfect recognition of Jehovah.* I. AN IMPURE, DEFECTIVE WORSHIP OF THE TRUE GOD PREPARED FOR THE WORSHIP OF FALSE GODS. "False worships make way for false deities."

II. UNDUE MAGNIFYING OF HUMAN IMPORTANCE AT THE EXPENSE OF THE HONOUR DUE TO GOD ALONE, DIVERTED FROM THE WORSHIP OF JEHOVAH, AND SO CUT THE ROOTS OF THE PERSONAL RESPECT IN WHICH HIS SERVANT WAS HELD. True religion is the foundation and safeguard of all the esteem and respect due from one to another. The heavenly Father is the key-stone of the whole house of life.—M.

Vers. 22, 23.—*Gideon and the theocracy.* This incident may be regarded in relation to the conduct of the men of Israel, to that of Gideon, and to the historical fact of the theocracy.

I. THE INCIDENT REGARDED IN RELATION TO THE CONDUCT OF THE MEN OF ISRAEL.

1. These men *assumed a power* which they did not rightfully possess. They had no authority to revise the constitution, no right to elect a king. The election of Gideon was an act of rebellion against "the Eternal." 2. These men were so dazzled by the splendour of human achievements that they *ignored the Divine influence* which was the source of them. Gideon's campaign was especially designed to avoid the danger of the people attributing to men what was really the work of God (ch. vii. 4). Yet they regarded Gideon as the sole hero, and forgot to glorify God. We are all too ready to recognise the human instrument only, and ignore the Divine power which is the source of all that is good and great. The very richness with which God has endowed a man of genius may tempt us to make this mistake. Yet the more gifted a man is, the more reason have we to attribute his greatness to the Giver of every good and perfect gift. 3. These men were drawn aside from trust in the Unseen to a *desire for earthly greatness*. The glory of Israel was its government by the unseen King. This implied faith. But the temptation often was to lose this faith and the holy life and simple state it required, and desire a human kingship and the pomp of an earthly court, such as that of the heathen nations. There is always great difficulty in living in the power of the spiritual. Tangible force and visible display tend to allure us from the serene spirituality of life in the unseen.

II. THE INCIDENT REGARDED IN RELATION TO THE CONDUCT OF GIDEON. 1. Gideon proved himself to be an *unselfish patriot*. True patriotism is incompatible with personal ambition. A nation has no greater enemies than its ambitious men of genius. The worthy statesman is he who aims at his country's good to the neglect of his own aggrandisement. 2. Gideon showed himself strong in *resisting the popular wish* when he knew this was unwise. We must not mould our character simply in obedience to the dictates of public opinion. The wish of the people is no excuse for doing wrong. There is no more difficult feat than to resist successfully the mistaken kindness of those who are seeking to promote a man's own honour and greatness, though in a way which he believes to be wrong. 3. Gideon proved himself *firm in fidelity to God*. Here lay the secret of his resistance. He had been called from the threshing-floor by God. He held himself throughout to be the servant of God. It is better to be a servant and faithful to God than a king and in rebellion against him. 4. Gideon showed his discernment at once (1) of the existence and

power of the theocracy which his contemporaries appear to have ignored, and (2) of its suitability for the happy government of his nation.

III. THE INCIDENT REGARDED IN RELATION TO THE THEOCRACY. 1. It is *not wise to propose a revolution* of government except for great and necessary ends. It is easy to overthrow the present order; it is not so easy to be sure that what we substitute will be better. We cannot calculate on the possible uses to which the new power we create may be appropriated. 2. The best method of government is that which is *best suited to the condition* of a nation. There came a time when a human kingship was necessary for Israel. The attempt to force this on before the country was ripe for it only ended in disaster (ch. ix. 5). 3. No government can be better than a *true theocracy*. This must be distinguished from the rule of priests and prophets which is sometimes falsely named a theocracy, although it is as much a human government as the rule of kings and soldiers. Nothing can be better than for a people to be guided by the thought of God to do the will of God. The government of the Church is a theocracy. The Papal assumption is therefore treason to Christ. "One is our Master" (Matt. xxiii. 8). To substitute any human authority for the direct guidance of Christ is to fall back to a lower state, like the conduct of Israel when the people were willing to abandon their Divine King for a human monarch.—A.

Vers. 34, 35.—*Forgetfulness and ingratitude*. As we pass through the historical records of the Bible we must often be struck with the stern faithfulness with which Jewish chroniclers describe the wicked and shameful deeds of their own nation. This fact is not only valuable as a proof of the unvarnished truthfulness of the narratives; it gives to the history of the Bible a universal character by making it a mirror of human nature. Thus the forgetfulness and ingratitude here recorded are unhappily typical of the too common conduct of mankind generally.

I. THE PREVALENCE OF THIS CONDUCT. Unnatural and monstrous as it appears in the narrative, it is so common in experience as to be scarcely noticed. It was constantly repeated in the history of Israel (Ps. lxxviii. 11, 42). It is prevalent in Christian communities. 1. It is not limited to *atheism*. The atheist denies the existence of God. The godless man believes that God exists, yet ignores his existence. The atheist is rare. But is there not something pharisaical and hypocritical in the horror with which he is regarded, as though the great multitude of men were far better than he, though so many of them forget the God of whose existence they are champions, and never render him worship or obedience. 2. It is not limited to *open irreligion*. We must not suppose that all people who do not go to church are utterly godless; but neither can we believe that all who do engage in public acts of worship really acknowledge God in their hearts. It is possible to forget God in the house of God, and to be guilty of base ingratitude while singing his praises. 3. It is not limited to *total godlessness*. There are those who, like the Jews, have known God, but have since forgotten and neglected him, and those who live nearer to him for a season, but are tempted at times to forsake him.

II. THE CAUSES OF THIS CONDUCT. 1. *Sin*. The people of Israel went after Baalim, and the result was that they forgot the Lord. We cannot have two supreme gods. Immorality is fatal to religion. 2. *Worldly distraction*. When no special fall into great sin has been experienced the mind may be drawn aside from Divine things, and so engrossed in business, politics, or the cares and pleasures of life, that no time or energy is left for spiritual thoughts (Matt. xiii. 22). 3. *Unspirituality*. Even when there is no great worldly distraction we may sink into a low, unspiritual habit of life, in which the thought of God becomes faint and feeble. It does require some spiritual effort to preserve the memory of God fresh and bright, because (1) he is invisible, and can only be apprehended in the inner life, and (2) his action is gentle, and does not rouse our attention by sensational methods (Hab. iii. 4). 4. *Loss of love to God*. We remember what we love. Indifference of heart creates negligence of thought. 5. *Selfishness*. Israel remembered God in the time of need and forgot him in the season of prosperity. Selfishness inclines us to remember God only when we want his aid.

III. THE GUILT OF THIS CONDUCT. 2. It implies *disloyalty to the rightful authority of God*. If we forget God we forget his will and neglect his service. We are not

free to do this, for we are naturally subjects of his supreme sovereignty. 2. It implies *indifference to his Fatherly nature*. He is our Father, and we are bound to him by ties of nature (Deut. xxxii. 18). 3. It implies *an unworthy return for his goodness*. Thankfulness is closely associated with thoughtfulness. The unthankful forget; those who do not take the trouble to think fall into gross ingratitude. Ingratitude to God is joined to ingratitude to his servants. The same spirit is seen in both sins. We are not likely to be true to man until we are first true to God.—A.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER IX.

Ver. 1.—*The son of Jerubbaal*. Through-out this chapter Gideon is spoken of by the name of Jerubbaal. There must be some cause for this. The simplest and most probable cause is that this whole history of Abimelech is taken from some other source than the preceding chapters. And a considerable difference in the style of the narrative, which is feebler and more obscure, seems to bear out this inference. *Went to Shechem*. This revolt from the house of Gideon in favour of Abimelech seems to partake of the nature of an Ephraimite rising against the supremacy of Manasseh. It was doubtless galling to the pride of the great tribe of Ephraim (ch. viii. 1, 2; xii. 1—6) that Ophrah of the Abiezrites should be the seat of government, and Gideon's ephod the centre of religion for the tribes of Israel. And so they seem to have taken advantage of Gideon's death, and of Abimelech's connection with Shechem, to make a league with the Hivite inhabitants of Shechem (see ver. 27, 28) to set up Abimelech as king, and to restore the worship of Baal, under the title of Baal-berith (ch. viii. 33; ix. 4, 27, 46), at Shechem for all Israel to resort to.

Ver. 2.—*All the sons, . . . which are threescore and ten persons*. Mark the evils of polygamy—producing family discord, extinguishing natural affection, causing civil strife, multiplying pretenders, and producing an ignoble and contemptible herd of helpless princes.

Ver. 3.—*His mother's brethren*. Presumably the Hivite population of Shechem.

Ver. 4.—*Threescore and ten of silver, i. e. shekels, which is always understood. Equal in value to about seven pounds; quite enough with which to hire a band of "vain and light persons," who would afterwards maintain themselves by plunder. Out of the house of Baal-berith. The custom of collecting treasures at the temple, both that of the true God and of idols, whether they were offerings and gifts for the service of the temple, or treasures deposited there for safety, was very general (see Joah. vi. 19; 1 Kings xv. 18; 1 Chron. xxix. 8; Dan. i. 2, &c.). The treasures belonging to the*

temple of Apollo at Delphi were very great, and excited the cupidity of Xerxes, who sent an army to plunder the temple, but was foiled in the attempt. The Phocians are related to have seized 10,000 talents from the treasury of Delphi, nearly two and a half millions sterling. The temple of Diana at Ephesus had considerable treasures in money, as well as other valuable articles. Many other notices of the riches of temple treasures occur in classical writers. *Vain and light persons*. Cf. Judges xi. 3; 1 Sam. xxii. 2; 2 Sam. xv. 1; 2 Chron. xiii. 7. *Vain*, literally, *empty*; *light*, literally, *boiling over*. Applied to the false prophets (Zeph. iii. 4). In German, *sprudelkopf* is a hot-headed, hasty man.

Ver. 5.—*Upon one stone*. Used as a block, on which the victims were executed one after another. Compare the similar wholesale murders of the seventy sons of Ahab by order of Jehu (2 Kings x. 7), of the seed royal of Judah by Athaliah (2 Kings xi. 1), of the whole house of Jeroboam by Baasha (1 Kings xv. 29), of the whole house of Baasha by Zimri (1 Kings xvi. 11, 12). Timour, on his conquest of Persia, is said to have destroyed the whole male family of the king. At the conquest of Bagdad he is said to have made a pyramid of 90,000 human heads. In Persia and Turkey in modern times it has been a common practice for the sovereign to slay or put out the eyes of all his brothers and cousins. So destructive of natural affection is polygamy, and so cruel is power.

Ver. 6.—*The house of Millo*. Millo must have been some strongly fortified post in the neighbourhood of Shechem, and no doubt the place where the tower was, mentioned in ver. 46, 47. At Jerusalem we read of *Millo* as a part of the city of David in 2 Sam. v. 9, apparently so called by the Jebusites, and the strengthening of it was one of Solomon's great works (1 Kings ix. 15, 24). It is called *the house of Millo* in 2 Kings xii. 20, where it is mentioned as the scene of the murder of King Joash. Here, therefore, *the house of Millo* probably means the citadel or keep of Shechem, a fortress analogous to the Bala-hissar in relation to Cabul, though possibly at a distance of a mile or two (ver. 46,

H

note). The phrase, *all the house of Millo*, means all the men who dwelt in the house of Millo, probably all men of war. Made Abimelech king. We seem to see the hand of the Canaanite population in this term *king*, which was proper to the Canaanites (Josh. xi., xii.), but was not yet domesticated in Israel. The plain of the pillar. This translation is clearly wrong. The word translated *plain* means an *oak* or *terebinth tree*. The word translated *pillar* is thought to mean a *garrison*, or *military post*, in Isa. xxix. 3 (A. V. *mound*); but, according to its etymology and the meaning of other forms of the same root, may equally well mean a monument, or stone set up, and this is probably the meaning here. The translation will then be *the oak of the monument*, a sense supported by the modern names of the mosque there, of which one is "the Oak of

Moreh," and another "the Saint of the Pillar" (see Stanley's 'Sermons in the East,' p. 182). And we are very strongly led to this conclusion by the further fact that there was a famous oak at Shechem, mentioned Gen. xxxv. 4 as the place where Jacob hid the idols of his household; and that Joshua took a great stone and "set it up under the oak that was by the sanctuary of the Lord" at Shechem (Josh. xxiv. 1, 26, 28). It marks a sad declension in the condition of Israel at this time, as compared with the days of Joshua, that the Shechemite Abimelech should be made king with a view to the restoration of Baal-worship on the very spot where their fathers had made a solemn covenant to serve the Lord. It is remarkable that the narrative in this chapter gives us no clue as to the relations of the rest of Israel with Abimelech.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—6.—*Self-aggrandisement*. If we study the characters of men famous either in profane or sacred history with a view not merely to their capacity, but to their moral worth, we shall observe one very marked distinction between them. Some, the few, evidently used their great powers and their great opportunities with entire disinterestedness, with singleness of purpose to promote God's glory and the happiness and welfare of their country, and not in any wise for self-aggrandisement. Such men, for example, as Moses, and Joshua, and Samuel, though they wielded all the power of the state, were entirely above the littleness of self-seeking. They had each a great mission, and they fulfilled it to the utmost of their ability with unswerving fidelity; they had each a weighty task intrusted to them, and they executed it with unflinching perseverance; but the idea of enriching themselves, or exalting their own families, seems never to have entered into their heads, or, at all events, never to have influenced their conduct. We can say the same of a few great names in profane history. It was true to a certain extent of Charlemagne; it was true pre-eminently of Alfred the Great; it was true of some of the early patriots of Rome, like Scipio Africanus, or Cincinnatus; of Washington, of Pitt, and of the Duke of Wellington. But in the bulk of the great men of history we cannot help seeing that the motive force which called forth their energies and stimulated their powers was ambition, the lust of conquest, the desire of wealth and greatness—in a word, self-aggrandisement. The career of such men of might as Alexander the Great, Julius Cæsar, Louis Quatorze, Napoleon Buonaparte, whatever eminent qualities of head or heart they may have displayed, gave unmistakable signs that they were really pursuing their own greatness as the end of their performances in the cabinet or in the field. We may trace the same distinction between men who have filled much less important places in the world. Compare, for example, Dunstan with Wolsey. The first, though we may think him mistaken, pursued a disinterested purpose with concentrated energy; the second had constantly in view the royal favour or the Papal throne. A comparison of Gideon and Abimelech presents the same sharp contrast. Gideon was roused by the call of God to seek his country's deliverance from a galling yoke, and to restore the worship of the true God in his native land. With the self-devotion of a Hofer, and the unflinching enthusiasm of a Luther, he gave himself to his double task, and accomplished it at the risk of his life without a thought of himself or any selfish ends. Abimelech, seeking power for himself, pretended to have in view the people's interest, and, to secure their favour, restored an abominable idolatry. His kingdom, founded in bloodshed, abetted by falsehood, and fostered by a base and cruel policy, had no end or motive but self-aggrandisement. There is exactly the same difference in the characters and conduct of men in the commonest

affairs of every-day life. Some men have high aims, and pursue them by righteous paths. Others have selfish ends, and pursue them in unscrupulous ways. Be it ours to aim at doing the will of God in the commonest as well as in the greatest actions of our lives. Let us steadily set before us the thing that is right as the end which we are to seek. Let us consider that our powers, be they great or small, are given to us that in the exercise of them we may give God glory and do good to man. Without calculation of selfish interests let us follow God's call, devote ourselves to do his good pleasure, seek our neighbour's welfare, and trust to God's loving-kindness to order for us what seems best to his godly wisdom. In so doing we shall be meet for the kingdom of God.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—6.—*Ambitious usurpation.* Nothing shows the extent and significance of Gideon's influence so much as the anarchy that followed his death. The presence of *one* may check, restrain, direct, &c. in a degree wholly inexplicable until its removal. The retrogression of peoples—how difficult to comprehend! Sometimes a single individual (at most a few) concentrates in himself all the highest tendencies of his time, the only original of what appears a common possession. The weakness—mental, spiritual, political, and religious—of the nation now reveals itself. A time like that following upon Gideon's judgeship tries men and declares their real motives. Of the usurpation now attempted, notice—

I. THE AIM. Worthy men seek to emulate the moral and intellectual excellence of the great deceased; unworthy, merely to succeed to their office and to enjoy their honours. It was a splendid opportunity which now presented itself to carry on, and to higher issues, the work initiated by Gideon. Instead of this, personal aggrandisement is the all-absorbing aim. Unscrupulous advantage is taken of the interregnum in the judgeship. And the more utterly base appears the project, inasmuch as it is not only what Gideon enjoyed that is sought, but what he rejected, as considering himself unworthy.

II. THE SPIRIT. 1. *Irreligious.* No betaking of himself to the oracle; no recognition of God as Supreme Arbiter and Judge-maker. 2. *Immodest.* Personal fitness is not questioned, nor is the superior qualification of others considered. 3. *Selfish.* The rights of others are trampled upon, human blood is spilled like water, and the nation is regarded only as a *corpus vile* for political experiments and ambitious aims.

III. THE MEANS AND METHODS. *Arguments.* Falsehood and sophistry. The alternatives presented—"Whether is better for you, either that all the sons of Jerubbaal, which are threescore and ten persons, reign over you, or that one reign over you?"—are not real. Charging others with the same aims as his own. Appeals not to the nation's sense of right, but to expediency, and kinship, &c. Its *occasion* is the misfortune and weakness of others. Its *instrumentality*, unhallowed gold and a mercenary soldiery. Its *method*, a series of wrongs culminating in murder.

IV. THE SUCCESS. Apparently sudden, complete, absolute; really hollow, involving constant distrust and fear, and ever new outrages, and having in itself the elements of ultimate judgment.—M.

Vers. 2, 3.—*Unrighteous claims of kindred.* A great force in the arrangements and promotions of human life. The unrighteousness of it often felt when it cannot be explained. As much to be deprecated in the endeavour to secure the ordinary advantages of life as in the competition for its great prizes and honours. Let us look closely at this plea, "He is our brother."

I. IT IS THE EXAGGERATION AND PROSTITUTION OF A NATURAL AND PROPER AFFECTION. Of the true claims of "our brother" how much might be said! A basis for moral obligations, and rights, and duties seldom fairly acknowledged. But to the desirable things of the world and "out in the open" there are many claimants whose title has to be weighed. The fond mother, desirous of such things for her son, may be asked, "Why *your* son, and not another's?"

II. IT IGNORES AND TRAMPLES UPON GENERAL INTERESTS FOR THE SAKE OF INDIVIDUAL ADVANCEMENT. Next to the absolute appointment by God, and often indicative of it,

is the "greatest good of the greatest number." The king or other public officer is *for the people*, not *vice versa*. Although absolute right may be sometimes waived because of general advantage, when both are wanting the claim is weak.

III. THE TRUE TITLE-DEEDS TO ADVANCEMENT ARE NOT RECOGNISED OR APPEALED TO. Divine appointment; unique capacity; desire for the good of others rather than the advantage of self; service rather than office; duty than right.—M.

Ver. 5.—*Shortcomings of unscrupulous schemes.* That there are instances of seemingly complete and permanent success cannot be denied. But the cases in which the act just falls short of success are too frequent and dramatically striking not to be pondered.

I. A MORAL GOVERNMENT OF THE WORLD IS WITNESSED TO.

II. IF EVIDENT IN SOME CASES, MAY NOT THE SAME LAW EXIST WHERE NOT CLEARLY VISIBLE?

III. IN THIS IS ILLUSTRATED THE ESSENTIALLY MORAL CHARACTER OF HIGHEST REASON. The wicked always leave something unconsidered or unprovided for. The lives and schemes of the wicked are based on fallacies. Truth and righteousness coincide.—M.

Ver. 6.—*Abimelech.* The character and life of Abimelech furnish us with a terrible picture of ambition in its bad origin, wicked character, temporary triumph, and fatal issues.

I. THE BAD ORIGIN OF AMBITION. This is illustrated in the circumstances which were associated with the early days of Abimelech. 1. *Irregular social habits.* The parentage of Abimelech would (1) stir in him a sense of injustice, and (2) incline him to lawless conduct (ch. viii. 30). Loose morals undermine the peace of society. Whatever desecrates the sanctity of the home tends to derange the order of the state. 2. *Parental vanity.* The high-sounding name of Abimelech is significant as an index to the character of his mother, and the thoughts she would instil into his mind. The vanity of the parent may be the curse of the child.

II. THE WICKED CHARACTER OF AMBITION. Abimelech displays some of the worst features of ambition. 1. *Selfishness.* The ambitious upstart has no thought of his nation's prosperity, his sole aim is his own aggrandisement. 2. *Deceit.* Abimelech deceives his brothers and the men of Shechem. True greatness is simple and frank; the bastard greatness of ambition is mean, false, treacherous. 3. *Cruelty.* The new king soon abuses the confidence of his brethren, and develops into a murderous tyrant. Ambition inclines to cruelty (1) because it isolates the ambitious man, and destroys the safeguard of the sympathy and influence of equals, and (2) because it creates dangers from which there seems no escape but by violence.

III. THE TEMPORARY TRIUMPH OF AMBITION. Abimelech reaches the throne at which he aims. 1. We must not be surprised at the temporary success of wickedness. It is easier for the unscrupulous to obtain a low worldly triumph than for the conscientious to reach their more noble goal. The irony of providence is apparent in the fact that these men "have their reward" (Matt. vi. 2). 2. We must not judge of conduct by worldly success. Success is no vindication of character. Bad conduct is not to be justified because it proves to have been expedient. The sycophancy which flatters triumphant ambition, while it execrates the ambition which fails, is one of the meanest characteristics of popular opinion.

IV. THE FATAL RESULTS OF AMBITION. 1. To the people who shamefully countenance it it brings disaster. Israel was the worse for tolerating Abimelech, and Shechem, which accepted and encouraged him, suffered the heaviest calamities at his hand. Instead of securing strength and peace, the new throne only flung disorder and misery into the nation. 2. To the ambitious man his conduct brought ultimate defeat, shame, and death. Greed of power is punished by a triumph of weakness. Pride and vanity meet with humiliation and ridicule.—A.

EXPOSITION.

Ver. 7.—**On the top of Mount Gerizim.** Mount Gerizim rises on the south-west side of Samaria or Shechem as a sheer rock about 800 feet in height, facing Mount Ebal, which is separated from it by the narrow valley, "some 500 yards wide," in which Samaria, now Nablûs, is built. It was from Mount Gerizim that Joshua, in accordance with the directions given by Moses in Deut. xi. 29, caused the blessings of the law to be proclaimed, after the capture of Ai, while the curses were proclaimed from Mount Ebal (Josh. viii. 33, 35). Some explain the name to mean "the mount of the Gerizzites," or Gerzites (1 Sam. xxvii. 8); but the absence of the article makes this doubtful. *Lifted up his voice.* Implying that a considerable effort was necessary to be heard by the people below. The narrowness of the valley, however, and the rocky nature of the cliffs there largely increase the sound. I have myself heard the human voice utter an articulate word at a measured distance of one mile one furlong and seventeen yards; but it was in a peculiar state of the atmosphere. The experiment has been made in recent years, and it has been proved that a man's voice can be distinctly heard in Nablûs, and also upon Ebal, from Gerizim. It is thought that Jotham, having emerged from one of the vast caverns, overhung with luxuriant creepers, which are in the mountain's side, "stood upon a huge projecting crag of Gerizim" just above the ancient site of Shechem, and thence addressed the people who were assembled beneath him. The rich vegetation of that well-watered spot, "unparalleled in Palestine," supplied the materials of his fable; for the olive, the fig, the vine all grow in that rich valley; while the bramble, which creeps up the barren side of the mountain, and which is still used to kindle the fire to roast the lamb at the Samaritan Passover, was to be seen there in abundance.

Ver. 8.—**The trees, &c.** This is the earliest example of a *fable* in Scripture; indeed the only one except that in 2 Kings xiv. 9. It is remarked that in the Indian and Greek fables the animals are the *dramatis personæ*, the fox, the lion, the ass, &c.; whereas in the only two specimens of Hebrew fable remaining to us, the members of the vegetable kingdom, the olive, the fig, the vine, the bramble, the cedar, the thistle, are the actors and speakers. The *parable*, of which Isa. v. 1—7 is a beautiful example, is quite different in its structure. Like the inimitable parables of our Saviour in the New Testament, it sets forth Divine truth under an image, but the

image and all its parts are in strict accordance with nature. In the Scripture *allegory* real persons and their actions prefigure the actions and the persons which they are intended to represent (see Matt. xii. 39, 40; Gal. iv. 21—31; Heb. xi. 19). Allegorical personages may, however, be fictitious, as in the 'Pilgrim's Progress.' The general meaning of this fable is clear. The trees worthy to reign for their intrinsic excellence refused the proffered kingdom one after another. The vilest and most unworthy accepted it. The result would be that a fire would burst out from the despicable bramble, and set fire to the lofty cedar tree. Thus Gideon refused the kingdom, and his sons had virtually refused it likewise. The base-born Abimelech had accepted it, and the result would be a deadly strife, which would destroy both the ungrateful subjects and the unworthy ruler.

Ver. 9.—**They honour God and man:** God, by the frequent offerings of oil with the meat offerings (Levit. ii. 1—16, &c.); and man, *e. g.*, by the solemn anointing with oil of kings, priests, and prophets (1 Sam. xvi. 12, 13; 1 Kings xix. 16; Ps. lxxxix. 21). *To be promoted, literally, to wave, or move, over, i. e. to rule, in the case of a tree.*

Ver. 13.—**Which cheereth God and man.** The wine is said to cheer, or make to rejoice, God because the drink offering which accompanied the meat offering consisted of wine (Numb. xv. 7, 10), and God was well pleased with the offerings of his people (cf. Gen. viii. 21; Phil. iv. 18; Heb. xiii. 16). The idea in this verse, as in vers. 9 and 11, is, that while the olive, the fig, and the vine were occupied in *waving* their branches over the other trees, in token of their superiority, they would necessarily be neglecting their own proper gift and office, which was to produce oil, and figs, and grapes.

Ver. 14.—**The bramble.** A prickly shrub; in Greek *ῥαμνός*, *Rhamnus*, "the southern buckthorn" (Gesenius). The same plant as is mentioned in Ps. lviii. 9 (thorns, A. V.) as used to make fires with (see note to ver. 7).

Ver. 15.—**If in truth, i. e. truly,** as the same phrase is rendered in vers. 16, 19, with integrity of purpose and sincerity of heart. The English would be less ambiguous if it ran, "If ye anoint me king over you in truth." The speech of the bramble indicates the grounds for suspicion already existing between Abimelech and the men of Shechem. *Let fire come out, &c.—keeping up the propriety of the image, as the natural function of the bramble was to kindle a fire, and as it had no other use; showing, too, how a base*

bramble could destroy a noble cedar, and the base-born Abimelech could bring ruin upon the lords of Shechem.

Vers. 16—20.—*Now therefore, &c.* The fable being ended, now comes the forcible and bitter application. The simple reference to Gideon's great actions, and the juxtaposition of the base and bloody deed in which the Shechemites and the men of the house of Millo had made themselves accomplices by choosing Abimelech for their king, formed an indictment which could not be answered. With lofty scorn and irony he wishes well to them if they had acted honourably; but if not, he predicts the inevitable Nemesis of an alliance founded in bloodshed and treachery and wrong, viz., the mutual hatred and destruction of the contracting parties. Observe how "the house of Millo" is consistently spoken of as a separate community from "the men of Shechem."

Ver. 21.—*Jotham ran away.* Being close to the top of Gerizim, Jotham had the open country before him. It would take the men of Shechem twenty minutes to ascend the hill, by which time Jotham would be out of sight, and two or three miles on his way. Beer, to which he fled, is thought to be either the same as *Beeroth*, among the heights of the tribe of Benjamin (Josh. ix. 17), now *El-Bireh*, "the first halting-place for caravans on the northern road from Jerusalem" ('Sinai and Palestine,' p. 210); or a place called by Eusebius *Bera*, now *El-Bireh*, eight Roman miles from Eleutheropolis (now *Beit Jibrin*), and possibly the same as the place of the same name described by Maundrell as four hours from Jerusalem, and two hours west of Bethel; or, as Ewald thinks, *Beer* beyond Jordan (Num. b. xxi. 16). It is impossible to decide which, or whether any, of these is the place designated as Jotham's place of refuge.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 7—21.—*The handwriting on the wall.* Among the many dramatic scenes which invest the pages of Holy Scripture with such singular interest, and give them such a hold upon the minds of all who read them with intelligence, perhaps none is more striking than that depicted in the fifth chapter of the prophet Daniel. A gorgeous spectacle is there presented to our view. The monarch of one of those mighty Oriental monarchies, which were a fearful embodiment of irresponsible human power over the lives and destinies of millions, was sitting in high estate in the palace of his kingdom; around him were a thousand of the highest nobles of his empire; the walls of the banqueting hall were adorned with the symbols of his royal power, and the emblematic images of the Babylonian and Assyrian gods. Upon the king's table were placed the golden and silver vessels which had once been used in the temple of the Lord at Jerusalem—trophies of past victory to feed his own pride with; trophies of the triumph of Bel and Nebo over the God of the Jews, with which to do homage to the gods of gold and silver, of brass and iron, of wood and stone. The wine sparkled in the goblets; the halls rang with hymns of blasphemous praise; insolent mirth, and voluptuous luxury, and security of power, and pride of dominion kept their high revel with audacious pomp. All faces were flushed with wine, all hearts beat high with self-confidence and arrogant success. One would have thought they held a lease of their power and pleasure for the term of eternity. The revel was at his height, when suddenly but noiselessly there came forth the fingers of a man's hand, and upon the wall just opposite the king's throne, on which the lamps were throwing the full glare of light, wrote the fatal words, *Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin*. The agony that passed over the king's face, the tumultuous terror of his heart, the smiting of his trembling knees, the frightened cry for the astrologers and magicians, the impotent honours to the servant of the living God, the breaking up of the festival, the consternation of the company, were but the prelude to what the sacred writer records with such pithy brevity. "In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain, and Darius the Median took the kingdom." Not very different in its spirit, though dressed in such a different garb, is the moral of the history in the verses which form the subject of our present meditation. By treachery, by wholesale fratricide, and by the help of the vainest and lightest in the land, the worthless Abimelech had risen to that place of kingly power which his great and patriotic father had refused to occupy. He had sought and obtained the co-operation of the idolatrous party among the people, he had appealed to the selfishness of the Shechemites, he had freely scattered bribes, and by such means he had obtained the desire of his heart. All seemed safe and prosperous, when from

the heights of Gerizim a voice of ill omen—it might seem a prophetic voice, certainly a voice big with unwelcome truth—rang in the streets of Shechem. The passers-by, the throng in the market-place, the base adherents and flatterers of the new-made king, were startled by the sound, and looking up to the rock which overhung their town, saw Jotham, the youngest son of their great benefactor and deliverer Jerubbaal, of him who had saved their country from slavery, and their people from Baal-worship, and the one member of his family who had escaped from the murderer's hand, standing upon the rocky ledge. With ready eloquence he caught their ear and fixed their attention, while he uttered his cutting rebuke, and poured out his prophetic curse. Surely the sweet morsel in the mouths of the successful conspirators must have turned to gall and wormwood as their own base ingratitude and treachery and the vileness of their worthless king were thus gibbeted before their eyes. Surely their guilty hearts must have sunk within them as the sure consequence of their misdeeds was held before their eyes with such marvellous power of conviction. It is this inevitable Nemesis, this certainty that men will reap what they have sown, this exposition of the naked hideousness of wrong-doing, this vileness of sin, breaking through all the glitter of success and all the glare of present prosperity, wealth, or power, in a word, the just judgment of God written by the finger of God upon the wall, or declared by the voice of God from the pulpits of his truth, that men so obstinately close their ears and shut their eyes to, but which the word of God so resolutely declares. It is the teacher's office to proclaim it, to enforce it, to urge it, to insist upon it, whether men hear or whether they forbear. But there are certain bye-truths connected with this central one of the ultimate bursting of ungodly prosperity which we shall do well also to consider. One is the absence of cohesion in the various elements of evil. There can be no real lasting friendship between bad men; they are incapable of love. The bonds of interest and of some common evil purpose may bind them together for a time, but the shifting of these interests bursts those bonds asunder, and real hatred succeeds to seeming love. Unscrupulous ambition may coalesce with base ingratitude, but it is only for a moment. The only real and lasting union is that of love in Jesus Christ; and here is the security of the Church of God. The divers instruments of the powers of darkness may combine against her, and harm her for a moment, but they have no principle of cohesion in them. But the love which unites the saints to one another and to Christ is indissoluble and eternal. Thus, for example, infidelity and superstition may combine to destroy the faith, but they will soon turn against each other with deadly hatred as exasperated foes. They that are Christ's will be one in Christ for ever and ever. The fable has also some striking touches of character which are very instructive. The forwardness and levity of empty self-conceit, the love of power just in proportion to a person's unfitness to wield it, the utter unscrupulousness of a selfish ambition, the meanness of personal pride, the fickleness of men who have not the ballast of integrity to steady them; and, on the other hand, the humility of true greatness, the true dignity of being useful to others rather than of being exalted ourselves, the propriety of mind which enables a man to discern his right place and to perform his proper duty—these and many other traits of character which it is most profitable to discern come out spontaneously from the sharp imagery of the fable. It is no mean part of personal religion to perfect a man's character in these and such like respects. The neglect of the lessons of Scripture in such practical details has sadly lessened the influence of religious men in the society in which they live. It has diminished their usefulness and lowered their happiness, while it has deprived the world of the full evidence which it might have had that God was in them of a truth.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 7—20. — *Jotham's fable; or, popular election, its dangers and abuses.* The earliest instance in Scripture of this literary form. Proneness of the Eastern mind to apologue. Advantage of vivid, picturesque personification of principles and of natural objects. Cryptic teaching and political suggestion may be thus embodied. Christ's parables instances of noblest use of this vehicle of thought. The following principles are taught by Jotham:—

I. NATIONS MAY BE ACTUATED BY CAPRICE AND FALSE CRAVINGS, AS WELL AS BY MORAL OBLIGATION.

II. GOOD AND WORTHY MEN WILL REFUSE TO BE THE PLAYTHINGS AND VENAL INSTRUMENTS OF OTHERS.

III. THERE ARE SACRIFICES FOR WHICH POLITICAL ADVANCEMENT DOES NOT COMPENSATE, AND WHICH IT DOES NOT JUSTIFY ONE'S MAKING.

IV. THE CHARACTER OF A PEOPLE IS REFLECTED IN THEIR POLITICAL REPRESENTATIVES.

V. HIGH POSITION MAGNIFIES POWERS OF MISCHIEF AS OF BLESSING.

VI. THE TRUST THAT HAS BEEN WON BY UNWORTHY ACTS WILL BE AS BASELY BETRAYED.—M.

Vers. 21.—*Strength in weakness.* How ridiculous does it sound: "*Jotham ran away!*" The bodily presence and outward achievements of really great men are often contemptible. But Jotham, like many another, is not to be estimated from without.

I. THE CONSCIENCE OF THE NATION WAS APPEALED TO THROUGH ITS IMAGINATION. He had shown himself to the whole people. The literary simplicity and charm of his fable would rivet the attention of men upon the essential wrong committed, and the folly.

II. THE MORAL FORCES OF THE WORLD ARE ITS STRONGEST, AND WILL IN THE END PREVAIL. The "case" had been portrayed by a stroke of genius, so that no craft or sophistry could ever justify it. The claim of Abimelech, &c. was stripped of all its pretensions. To leave a matter with the conscience of men and with God is often harder than to contest it by force of arms. Christ yielded to the physical force and perverted authority of the Jews, but by his bearing at the judgment and by the matchless clearness of his statements he put his persecutors for ever in the wrong, and became the mightiest Ruler the world has known.—M.

Vers. 8—15.—*Jotham's parable.* By casting his ideas in the form of a parable, Jotham not only makes them graphic and striking, he exalts them into the light of general principles, and thus teaches lessons which are applicable in all ages.

I. MEN ARE TOO READY TO SHELTER THEMSELVES UNDER THE INFLUENCE AND RESPONSIBILITY OF LEADERS OF THEIR OWN CHOOSING. The trees combined to elect a king; but this was contrary to their natural functions. They fulfilled their vocation perfectly in their individual life and fruit-bearing. So Israel resolved to have a king, though in opposition to the simple form of government which a realisation of the idea of the theocracy would have shown to be the noblest and happiest. Men trust too much to organisation; but organisation is injurious without wisdom and strength to use it aright. There is a common temptation to throw upon others the responsibility which should be borne in common. Thus in the kingdom of Christ the Church is inclined to leave to ministers and official persons the work which belongs to all her members. Men generally fear to be independent, though they are proud of their boasted liberty. The usual habit is to repose under the leadership of others. Such conduct implies unfaithfulness to our supreme King and the neglect of our own responsibility.

II. POSITIONS OF HONOUR DEMAND SACRIFICE FROM THOSE WHO CAN RIGHTLY OCCUPY THEM. Each of the fruit trees sees that it must sacrifice its own peculiar advantages in undertaking to rule over the forest. Rank and power involve loss of opportunities for private usefulness, anxiety, danger, responsibility. The quieter life is the happier. Nevertheless, it will be wrong to press these personal considerations to the neglect of public duty. For the good of others we should be willing to suffer personal inconvenience. It might have been better if one of the fruit trees had accepted the crown instead of letting it fall on the bramble. The selfishness which allows public offices to come into the hands of inferior men is a sin on the part of the more capable.

III. USEFULNESS IS BETTER THAN RANK. The olive, the fig, and the vine are fruitful. Unless they were absolutely needed as kings, the world would be the poorer by their forsaking their useful vocations for the glory of royalty. It is better to feel that we are doing good, however obscurely, than that we are reaping barren

honours. God is glorified not by our fame or rank, but by our fruitfulness (John xv. 8). To bear good fruit we must be rooted like the tree—be content, patient, willing to fill a small space if God be glorified. There is nothing so fatal to Christian fruitfulness as ambition.

IV. THE LOWEST NATURES ARE THE MOST AMBITIOUS. The bramble alone covets the crown. Ambition aims at greatness, but it arises out of littleness. The ambition of great men is their weakness, the smallest, meanest thing in them. True greatness will perceive the hollowness of the rewards of ambition, and the true glory of honest, faithful work in whatever sphere it is done. We must not therefore be deceived into judging of the fitness of a man for any post by the eagerness with which he seeks it. For ourselves we should learn that self-seeking in all its branches is a low and despicable habit of life.

V. THE EXALTATION OF THE MEAN WILL END IN DISASTER. Weakness is better than ill-lodged power. Better have no king than a bad king. As a good government is the first blessing of a nation, so a bad government is its greatest curse. They who enter blindly into needless obligations will have their eyes opened when these begin to work them harm. It is easier to confer power than to withdraw it. There is one King under whose shadow all can rest secure (Isa. xi. 1—5).—A.

EXPOSITION.

Ver. 22.—*Had reigned.* The Hebrew word here used is quite a different one from that in vers. 8, 10, 12, 14, and elsewhere, where the reign of a king is designated. It means to exercise dominion, to be a chief or captain over a people. The use of it here suggests that though, as we read in ver. 6, the Canaanite men of Shechem and the house of Millo had made him their king, yet he was not made king by the tribes in general, only he exercised a kind of dominion over them, or over a sufficiently large portion of them to warrant their being called *Israel*.

Vers. 23, 24.—These two verses contain the summary of what is related in detail in the rest of the chapter, and we are told that it all happened providentially, *that the violence done to the sons of Jerubbaal, and their blood, might come to be laid (literally, for some one to lay) upon Abimelech, &c. Which aided him—literally, strengthened his hands, by giving him money, and encouraging him to make way to the throne by killing his brothers.*

Ver. 25.—*The men of Shechem, &c.* The narrative now gives the details of that “treacherous dealing” on the part of the Shechemites which was spoken of in the gross in ver. 23. Their disaffection first showed itself in acts of brigandage “against the peace of their lord the king,” to use the language of our own mediæval lawyers. The road to Shechem was no longer safe; lawless freebooters, in defiance of Abimelech’s authority, stopped and robbed all travellers that passed that way, probably including Abimelech’s own officers and servants. For him. It may have been their intention even to lay violent hands upon Abimelech himself should he come to Shechem.

Ver. 26.—*Gaal the son of Ebed.* Who he was, or of what tribe or race he and his brethren were, we have no means of knowing; he seems to have been an adventurer who sought to turn the growing disaffection of the Shechemites to his own advantage by offering himself as a leader of the malcontents. Several MSS. and editions and versions read *Eber* for *Ebed*.

Ver. 27.—*And they went out, &c.* The next step forward in the rebellion was taken at the time of the vintage, probably when they were inflamed with wine; for, after they had gathered in and trodden the grapes, they kept high festival in the temple of Baal-berith, on occasion of offering to their god the solemn thank offering for the vintage. And then, speaking freely under the influence of wine, they cursed Abimelech. The whole talk of the company was of his misdeeds, and seditious and rebellious words were freely uttered on all sides. *Made merry.* Rather, *offered their thank offerings.* The same word is used in Levit. xix. 24: “In the fourth year all the fruit thereof (i. e. of the vineyard) shall be holy to praise the Lord withal”—literally, *praise offerings to the Lord.* These offerings were made by the Shechemites to Baal instead of to God.

Ver. 28.—*And Gaal, &c.* Gaal now saw his opportunity, and encouraged the revolt. *Who is Abimelech, and who is Shechem, that we should serve him?* The meaning of these words, though somewhat obscure at first, becomes plain if we compare the two similar passages, 1 Sam. xxv. 10; 1 Kings xii. 16. In the first we have the contemptuous question, “Who is David!” and in the second the analogous one, “What portion have we in David?” but in both we have the same person described by different terms:

"Who is David! and who is the son of Jesse!" and, "What portion have we in David! neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse." Here, therefore, it is clear that *Shechem* is merely another name for *Abimelech*; and it is easy to see why. Abimelech's mother was a Canaanite bond-woman, a Shechemite; and the plea for making Abimelech king was, "for he is our brother" (vers. 2, 3). *Shechem*, or the son of *Shechem*, was therefore a natural description of Abimelech. But, adds Gaal, is not he the son of Jerubbaal? and (is not) Zebul his officer? i. e. he is not a real Shechemite; he is the son of Jerubbaal; and what right has he to reign over you Shechemites! And why should Zebul lord it over you! He is only Abimelech's officer. No; serve the men of Hamor the father of Shechem. Fling off the yoke of the Abi-ezrite stranger, and set up a real Canaanite government from the old race of Hamor, the true founder and head of Shechem (cf. 1 Chron. ii. 50—52).

Ver. 29.—And would to God, &c., i. e. "If you will only trust me as your leader, I will soon remove Abimelech, and then you can have a national government." It seems that the people at once closed with his offer, and, thus emboldened, he sent a challenge to Abimelech to come out and fight him.

Vers. 30, 31.—And when Zebul, &c. Zebul, it appears, was governor of the city under Abimelech, and when the words of Gaal were reported to him, he privately sent off messengers to the king to tell him the state of affairs at Shechem, and urge him to come in person. Zebul meanwhile temporised, not being strong enough to resist Gaal openly. Privily. The word only occurs here. It probably means a little more than *privily*,—viz., with subtlety or deceit,—because he pretended all the while to be a friend of Gaal. Some make it a proper name, "In Rumah," taking it for the same place as Arumah (ver. 41).

Ver. 35.—And Gaal, &c. It does not appear certain whether Gaal, who, as is clear from ver. 36, was accompanied by Zebul, went out of the city gate with his men in consequence of any intelligence of Abimelech's movements, or any alarm or suspicion of danger, or merely upon some other enterprise. But whatever the cause was, as soon as he was there, Abimelech, according to Zebul's advice in ver. 38, had begun to descend from the mountains into the valley to "set upon the city." Gaal's quick eye detected them in the morning light.

Ver. 36.—Saw the people, i. e. Abimelech's followers. He said to Zebul, whom he looked upon as a friend and confederate. Zebul said to him, &c. Partly to give Abimelech time, and partly to conceal his own complicity in Abimelech's movements,

Zebul affected not to see the men, and explained the appearance as being merely the shadows of the mountains cast before the rising sun.

Ver. 37.—Gaal spake again, &c. Of course, as the men got nearer, it was impossible to mistake them for anything but men. Gaal could see two bands distinctly, one coming down the hill-side, the other marching by the road of the soothsayers' oak. The middle of the land. The word rendered *middle* only occurs again in Ezek. xxxviii. 12, "the midst of the land," A. V. It is so rendered from the notion of the old interpreters that it was connected with a word meaning "the navel." It is usually explained now to mean the height. There may have been some particular height in the ridge called *Tabbur ha-arets*. The plain of *Meonenim*. Rather, the oak (or terebinth tree) of the soothsayers, some large terebinth or turpentine tree under which the soothsayers used to take their auguries. Dean Stanley would identify it with the oak of the pillar in ver. 6, where see note.

Ver. 38.—Then said Zebul, &c. Zebul now throws off the mask, and dares Gaal to carry out his boast in ver. 28.

Ver. 39.—Before the men of Shechem, i. e. at their head, as their leader, as the phrase not uncommonly means (Gen. xxiii. 3; Exod. xiii. 21).

Ver. 40.—Were overthrown and wounded. The simple translation of the Hebrew is, and there fell many slain even unto the entering of the gate, showing that Abimelech's men pursued them to the very gate of the city.

Ver. 41.—Arumah. A place not otherwise known, but apparently (ver. 42) very near Shechem, and possibly the same place as *Rumah*, the birthplace of Queen Zebudah (2 Kings xxiii. 36), and, from its name, apparently among the mountains. Zebul thrust out, &c. Gaal was so much weakened by his defeat that Zebul was now strong enough to expel him and the remainder of "his brethren" from the city.

Vers. 42, 43.—And it came to pass, &c. The Shechemites, believing Abimelech to have retired, and hoping that he would be satisfied with the chastisement inflicted upon them in the battle of the day before, left the protection of their walls next morning to pursue their usual avocations in the field. Abimelech's spies in the city being aware of their intention immediately reported it to him. Upon which he hastily took his army, divided them as before into three companies, lay in ambush in the field till the Shechemites were well out in the country, then attacked the Shechemites in the field with two of the companies, and himself at the head of the third rushed to the city gate to intercept their retreat.

Ver. 44.—**The company.** The Hebrew has *companies*, but the sense requires the singular.

Ver. 45.—**Abimelech fought against the city, &c.** When all the Shechemites in the field were smitten or dispersed, Abimelech stormed the city, weakened as it was by the previous loss of so many of its defenders. The city made an obstinate defence notwithstanding, but was taken before night, and all the inhabitants were put to the sword. The walls were then razed to the ground, and the site was sown with salt to express the wish that it might be barren and uninhabited for ever (cf. Pa. cvii. 34, marg.; Jer. xvii. 6). This action of sowing with salt is not elsewhere mentioned; but it is well known that salt destroys vegetation, and is used by gardeners for this very purpose. Pliny (quoted by Rosenmüller) says, *Omnis locus in quo reperitur sal sterilis est.*

Ver. 46.—**The men of the tower of Shechem.** The tower of Shechem is no doubt the same fortified building as was spoken of in vers. 6 and 20 by the name of the house of Millo (see note to ver. 6). *An*, or rather *the*, hold. The word so rendered occurs elsewhere only in 1 Sam. xiii. 6, where it is rendered *high places*, and is coupled with *caves*, *thickets*, *rocks*, and *pits*, as one of the hiding-places of the Israelites from the Philistines. It was probably some kind of keep built on an eminence, and the place where the treasure of the temple was kept (ver. 4). It appears from the narrative that the tower of Shechem, or house of Millo, was not actually part of Shechem, nor immediately contiguous, since the report of the capture of Shechem had to be carried thither. **The god Berith.** It should rather be *El-berith*, the same as *Baal-berith* in ver. 4—*El*, i. e. *god*, being substituted for *Baal*.

Ver. 48.—**Mount Zalmon, i. e. the shady mount**, so called from the thick wood which grows upon it. It was in the neighbourhood of Shechem, and is perhaps the same as that mentioned in Pa. lxxviii. 14 as famous for its snow-storms. **An axe.** The Hebrew has *axes*. If this is right, the phrase in his hand must be rendered *with him*, as 1 Sam. xiv. 34: Each one his ox *in his hand*, i. e. *with him*; Jer. xxxviii. 10: Take thirty men *in thy hand*, i. e. with thee; and elsewhere.

Ver. 49.—**Set the hold on fire**—thus literally fulfilling Jotham's curse in vers. 15 and 20. It is thought by many that those who thus perished miserably by suffocation and fire in the hold of the temple of Baal-berith had taken sanctuary there, not occupied it for the purposes of defence.

Ver. 50.—**Thebez.** A place so called still existed in the time of Eusebius between

Neapolis (i. e. Shechem) and Scythopolis (i. e. Beth-shean), about thirteen miles from Shechem. It still survives in the large and beautiful village of *Tubas*, which, Robinson tells us, is on the Roman road between Nablus and Beishan. Thebez had evidently joined the rebellion against Abimelech.

Ver. 51.—**They of the city.** In Hebrew (*baaley*) *the men of the city*, i. e. the owners or citizens, the same phrase as is used throughout the chapter of *the men of Shechem* (cf. Josh. xxiv. 11; 1 Sam. xxiii. 11, 12). The English phrase *master*, or *my masters*, is very similar. The A.V. has here paraphrased it *they of the city*, to avoid the repetition of the word *men*. **The top**—the flat roof or house-top.

Ver. 52.—**To burn it with fire**—encouraged by his success at the tower of Shechem.

Ver. 53.—**A millstone.** The word here used means the *upper millstone*, which *rides* as it were, or moves, over the fixed nether stone. **All to brake his skull.** This obsolete English phrase has been the subject of a recent controversy. In the older English of Chaucer and his immediate successors such compounds as *to-break*, *to-burst*, &c. were very common, and were frequently preceded by the adverb *all*. Hence, some English scholars would read the phrase here, and *all to-brake his skull*. It is, however, certain that before the time when the A.V. was made the compounds *to-break*, *to-burst*, &c. had become entirely obsolete, and the compound *all-to* had come into use. The right way, therefore, in which to read the present phrase is, and *all-to brake his skull*, i. e. smashed it, dashed it in pieces. The prefix *all-to* gives intensity to the verb.

Ver. 54.—**His armour-bearer**—an office of trust, entailing much intimacy. Saul loved David greatly, and he became his armour-bearer (1 Sam. xvi. 21). Compare the similar incident of Saul and his armour-bearer in 1 Sam. xxxi. 4—6.

Ver. 55.—**The men of Israel—Abimelech's followers** (see ver. 22).

Ver. 56.—**Which he did unto his father.** It is remarkable that the sacred writer, in calling attention to the righteous vengeance which fell upon the head of Abimelech, marks especially the conduct of Abimelech as undutiful to his father (see Exod. xxi. 17; Matt. xv. 4; cf. also Gen. ix. 24—26).

Ver. 57.—**The men of Shechem.** Not here *baaley*, but simply *men*. Each such evidence of the righteous judgment of God is a prelude of the judgment to come, and encourages the reflection of the Psalmist: "Verily there is a reward for the righteous; doubtless there is a God that judgeth the earth" (Ps. lviii. 10, Pr. B. vers.).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 22—57.—*Be sure your sin will find you out.* We are living under the government of God, and though many things happen in the world which seem strange and inexplicable to us upon the theory of God's righteous rule over mankind, yet we have but to be patient, and to observe impartially the end of things, in order to see by many infallible proofs that God is good to those who are of a clean heart, and that the end of the ungodly is that they shall perish. Nor can we afford to lose the evidences of God's righteous judgment. The immediate present fills such a large space in our view; ungodly mirth, successful wickedness, prosperous iniquity, bold blasphemy, the triumphs of sin, the rewards of selfishness, the impunity of evil livers, parade themselves so ostentatiously in the world, that the steps of our faith in God might easily slip if we did not keep steadily in mind the lessons taught us by the providence as well as by the word of God. Now it may be safely affirmed that the whole course of this world presents to the impartial observer continuous evidence that "the way of transgressors is hard," and that "there is no peace to the wicked;" while, on the contrary, the "way of the just is as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day." It is quite true that this evidence is from time to time, as it were, crossed and checked in its flow by puzzling phenomena of a different character. But just as the ebbing or flowing tide is apparently interrupted by single waves which exceed or fall short of their expected place, and yet for all that is steadily receding or advancing; or as the temperature of the advancing spring for a time declines, or that of the advancing autumn increases, and yet a sure advance is being made towards summer heat or winter cold, so it is with the righteous judgment of God. Under it, in spite of apparant exceptions and temporary diversions, the righteous are advancing in the way of peace, and the ungodly are bringing upon themselves a righteous retribution. Fasten the eyes of your mind then upon these truths; observe them working themselves out in the daily lives of men before your eyes, and in the career of nations as delineated in the page of history. See how the sins of a man are continually finding him out in the most unexpected ways, and at the most unexpected times. Mark how evil deeds, unpunished at the time, nay, apparently successful, forgotten by the doer, and thought by him to be for ever passed away, yet come back to him, stand in his way, become thorns in his sides, frustrate his hopes, mar all his purposes, break out into deadly consequences, cast a dark shadow upon his life. Look at the life of nations. The barbarians of the North avenging the abominations of imperial Rome; the Turkish empire withering away because of its bloody deeds, its cruel oppressions, its detestable sensualities; the expulsion of the Jews; the wrongs of the Indians; the butcheries of the Inquisition, still wasting away the life and power of Spain; the French nation, receiving in bloody revolutions and still more bloody wars the just reward of the adulteries and unblushing vices of her monarchs and nobles: and, most striking of all, the Jewish race, suffering through eighteen centuries of slaughter and pillage and persecution and wandering, without a home and without a country, the vengeance which they called down upon themselves for the blood of the Son of God, whom they crucified and slew. Or learn the same lesson in another way. Observe how in the very nature of things the tendency of wickedness is to defeat its own ends, and to bring sorrow upon them that work wickedness. The successful lie when found out works distrust and suspicion in all with whom a man has to do. The deed of violence and blood arouses hatred and abhorrence in the breasts of those cognisant of it. The act of unscrupulous power awakens fear and jealousy and resentment in the beholders. The wrongs of women raise up avengers among men. The avarice which plunders and wrings treasures from their possessors leaves a sting of resentment behind it; and when a man has surrounded himself with distrust and suspicion, and hatred and abhorrence, with envies and jealousies, and resentment and fierce revenge, what room is there left for happy enjoyment or quiet possessions? His sin finds him out in the very midst of his success, and he reaps according to what he has sown; so that in the very operation of the natural laws which attach to right and wrong we see the just judgment of God. In the marvellous pages of Holy Scripture these natural lessons are illustrated, exemplified, and enforced with a clearness

and a vigour unequalled and unapproached in any writings of man. They culminate in the declaration of the coming of the day of judgment, when God will reward every man according to his works. The observed tendencies of good and evil will then be fully confirmed. Every work will then have its proper recompense of reward: all inequalities will be redressed, the temporary exceptions will disappear, the just procedure will be vindicated to the utmost. In the full court of heaven and earth God will show himself a righteous judge, when all men shall stand before the judgment seat of Christ. The flood which drowned the world of the ungodly, the fire which burnt up the cities of the plain, the miserable end of the tyrant Abimelech, the dogs which licked the blood of Ahab by the vineyard of Naboth, the flames which devoured the temple at Jerusalem, and the instances which every day brings before us of shame and sorrow springing out of sin, are but prophetic voices, to which we shall do well to take heed, confirming the announcement in the word of God of that great and terrible day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, and will reward every man according to his works.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 22—57.—*The Nemesis of usurpation.* The quick succession of events shows that the political situation is one of unstable equilibrium. The movement of affairs is rapid, as if the stage were being cleared for the real and important action that is to follow.

I. A NATURAL ELEMENT. The instruments of usurpation soon display their untrustworthy and turbulent character. Their help to Abimelech was chiefly in the interests of disorder. When the hard rule of the tyrant (force of word "reigned") was felt they became restive. The accession to their ranks of Gaal the marauding chieftain gives them the requisite stimulus toward open rebellion. So in time the drunken revels, the highway robberies of Shechem move irresistibly onward toward open revolt, and its consequence, overwhelming destruction. In this way the perpetrators of the *coup d'état* are made the agents of the Divine vengeance upon each other. In punishing the rebels a seeming accident made Abimelech the victim of a woman's hand. Blood for blood. "Without shedding of blood there is no remission." The tragic element in human history.

II. A DIVINE ORDERING OF EVENTS. So natural does the development of events appear, that there is danger of overlooking the overruling providence of God. What may be termed the "poetic justice" of the political movements of the time and their results renders it impossible to credit the sublimely neutral forces of nature with the working out of the issues. God wrought through the natural forces and the complications of the political sphere. His people have to be led onward in the pathway of national progress and religious illumination, therefore such obstacles must be swept out of the way. Yet all this is consistent with the moral freedom of those whose actions and end are so promotive of the Divine purpose. What was done in one development of events might equally have been secured by another. This principle that "maketh for righteousness" is evident to every careful and devout student of history. It may be detected in the individual private life, and in the history of a nation. How far the evolution of events which we esteem secular and blind is so informed by the Divine purpose we shall not discover in this life. But enough is laid bare to encourage the holy and righteous, and to awaken in the breast of the wicked "a fearful looking for of judgment and of fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries."—M.

Vers. 30—33, 36—38.—*A worthy servant of a worthless master.* Zebul served Abimelech faithfully according to his lights. His devotion appears strangely misplaced.

I. GOD RELATES THE LIVES OF THE GOOD AND THE BAD FOR WISE ENDS. "Never any man was so ill as not to have some favourers: Abimelech hath a Zebul in the midst of Shechem" (Bp. Hall). Every situation has its moral complications.

II. THE WORTHLESSNESS AND IMMORALITY OF A SUPERIOR DO NOT EXONERATE FROM EXTERNAL RESPECT AND FAITHFUL DUTY, UNLESS HIS AUTHORITY IMPOSES UNRIGHTEOUS

TASKS. Much of the routine of life is neutral from a moral point of view, otherwise it would be impossible for the righteous to live amongst men. We must fulfil our bond until the conduct of our employer renders it impossible for us to serve God in serving him. So with natural duties, as of a child to a parent.

III. ON THE OTHER HAND, FAITHFULNESS IN DETAILS WILL NOT ATONE FOR NEGLECTING TO STUDY THE MORAL DRIFT OF THE WHOLE SITUATION OF WHICH THESE DETAILS ARE A PART. The judgment of Abimelech involves Zebul. There comes a time when we share the guilt of the master in continuing to serve him. An honourable quittance should be sought at once in such a case. "The Lord will provide." Otherwise we shall be involved in the same judgment.—M.

Ver. 55.—Without a leader. Nothing is more striking than the contrast between the conduct of mercenary or coerced soldiers in such circumstances and that of men inspired by noble enthusiasm and great principles.

I. THERE ARE TIMES WHEN THE DEATH OF SOVEREIGNS, &C. APPEAR AS NATIONAL JUDGMENTS, OVERAWING MEN'S HEARTS AND SEARCHING THEIR CONSCIENCES. Did not Israel feel now what a fool's errand it had been going? What better could it do in its irresolution and dismay than retire into privacy, and there in penitence and prayer await the new unfoldings of God's purpose?

II. ONLY A GREAT CAUSE CAN KEEP TOGETHER THOSE WHO HAVE LOST THEIR NATURAL BOND AND AUTHORITY. Self-interest, fear, absence of common enthusiasm, scattered the army of the dead Abimelech. So shall misfortune and Divine judgments break up the confederacies of the wicked. "The stars in their courses fought against Sisera." But the Church of Christ can never be leaderless. "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."

III. THE INFLUENCE OF THE WICKED SOON PERISHES. There is no talisman in the name of the son of Shechem now that he is dead. His body is left to the wolves and vultures. Only "the memory of the just smells sweet, and blossoms in the dust." The saintly departed rule us from their graves. The name of the Crucified an eternal, infinite power.—M.

Vers. 53, 54.—Reputation. In the moment of his death Abimelech is anxious to save his reputation, which he thinks would be dishonoured if it could be said that a woman slew him.

I. REPUTATION AMONGST MEN IS SOMETIMES VALUED MORE HIGHLY THAN INNOCENCE IN THE SIGHT OF GOD. Abimelech is anxious about the opinion of the world, he cares nothing for the judgment of God. He is concerned with what will be said of him, he is not troubled about what he really is. He is dying after a most wicked life, yet he has no thought about his evil nature and his vile misdeeds, but only anxiety about his fame. So we constantly see people much more occupied in securing a fair appearance than in living a true life. Yet how hollow is this pursuit! After our death it matters nothing to us what men may say, but everything turns on what God will do. A man's future state will depend not on the splendour of the fame which he leaves behind in this world, but on the character of the revelation which will be made of his life in the other world. An epitaph is no passport to heaven.

II. REPUTATION AMONGST MEN IS OFTEN DETERMINED BY A FALSE STANDARD OF CHARACTER. Abimelech knows that his misdeeds have been blazed through the country, yet he has no concern for the judgment of men on these, but very much concern for their opinion of the accident of his death. He sees no dishonour in cruelty and treachery, but great dishonour in death from a woman's hand. The code of honour differs from the code of God's law. Public opinion is too much formed on artificial points of merit and superficial appearances. Thus cowardice is commonly felt to be more disgraceful than cruelty; yet it is at least as bad not to be just and generous as not to be brave. Men commonly think more of masculine excellences than of saintly graces. Both are good, but the first obligation lies on the more Christian. Among the Christian duties which a consideration of merely worldly reputation leads men to neglect in comparison with lower obligations, are—(1) purity on the part of men, (2) humility, (3) forgiveness of injuries, (4) charity.

III. THE INFLUENCE OF REPUTATION SHOWS THE IMPORTANCE OF CULTIVATING A

HEALTHY PUBLIC SENTIMENT. Whilst so many are governed by the opinion of the world, it is imperative that this should be purified as far as possible. There is something natural in respect for reputation. The bad man who has lost this proves himself to be utterly abandoned. Next to the fear of God, shame before men is the strongest safeguard for conscience. A healthy social atmosphere is an immense aid to goodness. The society of the Church is helpful for the preservation of the faithfulness of the Christian. A pure Christian home is a most valuable security for the character of its members. It is dangerous to stand alone; therefore, while regarding right and God's will first, and rising above the fear of man which bringeth a snare, let us reverence Christian public sentiment, and seek to keep it pure.—A.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER X.

Ver. 1.—Tola the son of Puah, the son of Dodo. Nothing more is known of Tola than what is here told us, viz., his name, his parentage, his dwelling-place, his office, the length of time which he held it, and the place of his burial. Who were the enemies from whom Tola was raised up to save Israel we are not told. There was probably no great invasion or grievous servitude, but perhaps frequent border wars requiring an able and watchful chief to maintain the independence of Israel. Tola and Puah (otherwise written Puvah) were both names of families in Issachar (Gen. xvi. 18; Numb. xxvi. 23). Shamir in mount Ephraim, to distinguish it from Shamir in the hill country of Judah (Josh. xv. 48). Both are otherwise unknown.

Ver. 3.—Jair. We read of Jair the son of Segub, the son of Machir's daughter by Hexron, in 1 Chron. ii. 21—23, and are there told that he had twenty-three cities in the land of Gilead (called Havoth-jair), which were included in the territory of the sons of Machir. The same information is given in Numb. xxxii. 40—42, and in Deut. iii. 14, 15, in both which passages Jair is styled the son of Manasseh, and is stated to have called the cities after his own name, Havoth-jair. In the present verse we are also told that Jair the judge was a Gileadite, and that he had thirty sons who had thirty cities in Gilead called Havoth-jair. The question arises, Can these two be the same person? If they are, Deut. iii. 14 must be a later parenthetical insertion, as it has very much the appearance of being. The notice in Numb. xxxii. 41 must also refer to later times than those of Moses, and we must understand the state-

ment in 1 Chron. ii. 22, that "Segub begat Jair," as meaning that he was his lineal ancestor, just as in Matt. i. 8 we read that "Joram begat Ozias," though three generations intervened between them. If, on the other hand, they are not the same, we must suppose that Jair in our text was a descendant of the other Jair, and may compare the double explanation of the name Havoth-jair with the double explanation of *Beer-sheba* given Gen. xxi. 31; Gen. xxvi. 31—33; the threefold explanation of the name *Isaac*, Gen. xvii. 17; xviii. 12; xxi. 6; and the double explanation of the proverb, "Is Saul among the prophets?" given in 1 Sam. x. 11, 12; xix. 23, 24. The Hebrew name *Jair* is preserved in the New Testament under the Greek form of *Jairus* (Mark v. 22).

Ver. 4.—Thirty *ass colts*. The number and dignity of these knightly sons of Jair shows that Jair himself, like Gideon (ch. viii. 30), assumed the state of a prince. The word in Hebrew for *ass colts* is identical with that for *cities*, as here pointed, and this play upon the words belongs to the same turn of mind as produced Jotham's fable and Samson's riddle (ch. xiv. 14).

Ver. 5.—Jair . . . was buried in Camon. A city of Gilead according to Josephus, and probability. Polybius mentions a *Camoun* among other trans-Jordanic places, but its site has not been verified by modern research. Eusebius and Jerome place it in the plain of Esdraelon, but without probability. The careful mention of the place of sepulture of the judges and kings is remarkable, beginning with Gideon (ch. viii. 32; x. 2, 5; xii. 9, 10, 12, 15; xvi. 31; 1 Sam. xxxi. 12; 2 Sam. ii. 10, &c.).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—5.—*The lull.* In the affairs of nations, as in the lives of men, there are occasional periods of uneventful quietness, when the storms and winds of stirring interests and aggressive actions are lulled, and a monotonous rest succeeds to exciting change. At such times no great characters stand out from the historic canvas, no activity of mind producing a clashing of opinion agitates the surface of society, no great

measures are called for, no striking incidents of a prosperous or of an adverse kind diversify the scene. It is so likewise sometimes in the Church. Hereay is still; persecution is still; aggressive movements of parties are still; controversy is hushed; Christianity folds her wings and takes no flight into distant lands; there are no reformers at work. Fanaticism is asleep; the uniformity of slumber supersedes the diversities of energetic religious life. Such periods of stillness may have their uses in Church and State, but they have their evils likewise. And they are only temporary; often only the lull before the storm. Such were the forty-five years of the judgeships of Tola and Jair. In their days we read of no invasions of their foes. No Gideon comes to the front with the strong life of unquenchable faith and indomitable courage. The only events chronicled are the peaceful ridings of Jair's sons upon their asses' colts amidst their ancestral cities. But troublous times were at hand. It was the lull before the storm. Would the storm find the people prepared? The sequel will show. Meanwhile the reflection arises, Be it our aim in quiet times not to fall asleep; in times of excitement not to lose the balance of a sober mind and the calmness of a deep-rooted faith.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1-5.—*The calm after the storm.* Partly exhaustion, partly consciousness of Divine judgment, restrains the spirit of Israel. The punishment of its unfaithfulness had come from within itself, and was the more felt. The pendulum now swings slowly back.

I. IT WAS A "PEACE OF GOD." The hand of Jehovah was seen. The consciences even of the wicked had been touched. So in the lives of individuals and nations there are times given of God after judgments in which to repent and amend; and these are not of their own creation, but a result of a gracious Providence. But as they are each a calm after a storm, so, being unimproved, they may be but the portentous lulls before greater judgments. The enemy from without is restrained, as if to say that the real danger could only arise from within.

II. ITS CHARACTER. Undistinguished by great individual exploits; but showing a general advance in civilisation, the arts of peace, and external respect for government and religion. The solid monuments of the people's industry and foresight (the cities of the circle of Jair, &c.) remained. A happier generation lived and thrived over the ashes of the guilty past; and some steps were taken towards the more settled and permanent type of government, the monarchy.

III. ITS IMPORT. God's punishments and judgments are intended to prepare for peace. The sinner can never say he has had "no room for repentance." But this was only external and temporary peace—a truce with an unreconciled Heaven. It is precious, therefore, only as making for and typifying the kingdom of Christ, and the peace of believers, which follow upon storm and overturning and Divine chastisements, but confer unspeakable blessings and make happy.—M.

Vers. 1-5.—*Quiet times.* I. THE BEST MEN ARE NOT ALWAYS BEST KNOWN. We know nothing of Tola and Jair in comparison with what we know of Abimelech. Yet the very fact that little is said of them is a proof that they were good and honest men. We are too ready to mistake notoriety for fame and both for signs of greatness. They are not the greatest men who make the most noise in the world. It is something if this censorious world can say no ill of us. Aim at doing well rather than at striking attention.

II. QUIET TIMES ARE HAPPY TIMES. Israel was now experiencing the happiness of the people whose annals are dull. It is generally a miserable thing to be the subject of an interesting story; the more full of incident the story is, the more full of distress will be the person to whom it relates. Happiness generally visits private lives in their obscurity, and forsakes those which are protruded into the glare of vulgar curiosity. David's happiest days were spent with the sheep on the hills of Bethlehem. Christ found more happiness at Capernaum than in Jerusalem.

III. QUIET TIMES ARE OFTEN HEALTHFUL TIMES. There is a quietness which betokens the stagnation of death, and there is a condition of ease which favours indolence;

luxury, and vice. But there is also a quietness of healthy life (Isa. xxx. 15). The flowers grow, not in the noisy storm, but in soft showers and in quiet sunshine. In times of quiet a nation is able to effect legislative improvements, to open up its internal resources, to develop commerce, to cultivate science, art, and literature, and to turn its attention to the promotion of the highest welfare of all within its borders. In times of quiet the Church is able to study Divine truth more deeply and to carry out missionary enterprises with more energy. In times of quiet rightly used the soul enjoys the contemplation of God and grows under the peaceful influences of his Spirit (Ps. lxxii. 6).

IV. QUIET TIMES ARE MORE FREQUENT THAN WE COMMONLY SUPPOSE. History directs inordinate attention to scenes of tumult, and necessarily so. Hence we are likely to magnify the range of these. In times of war there are vast areas of peace. The terrible seasons which attract our attention are separated by long intervals of quiet which pass unnoticed. Thus it was (1) in the history of Israel, which is really not so dark as it appears because so many generations were spent in peaceful obscurity; (2) in the history of our own country, of the Church, and of the world; and (3) in our own lives, since we commonly recollect the troublesome times (which are striking partly just because they are abnormal), and ungratefully ignore the long, quiet seasons of unbroken blessings.—A.

EXPOSITION.

Ver. 6.—*Did evil again.* We may conclude that Tola and Jair had used their influence to maintain the worship of Jehovah; but at their death idolatry broke out with more virulence than ever. Not only were the many altars of Baal and Ashtoreth honoured, as in former times, but new forms of idol-worship, according to the rites of all the neighbouring nations, were introduced among them. The gods of Syria, *i. e.* Aram, who are not usually named, but whose worship is spoken of (2 Chron. xxviii. 23), and whose altar attracted the attention of Ahaz (2 Kings xvi. 10), and one of whom was Rimmon (2 Kings v. 18); the gods of the Zidonians, Baal and Ashtoreth, probably with rites somewhat differing from those of Canaan; Chemosh, the god of the Moabites; Milcom or Moloch, the god of the children of Ammon; and Dagon, the god of the Philistines—all were worshipped, while the service of Jehovah was thrust aside (see 1 Kings xi. 5—7).

Ver. 7.—*The anger of the Lord, &c.* See ch. ii. 13, 14. *Into the hands of the Philistines.* Probably the same Philistine domination as is described more fully in the history of the judgeship of Samson (chs. xiii.—xvi.). But now the writer confines his attention first to the oppression of the Ammonites.

Ver. 8.—*That year.* It does not appear clearly what particular year is meant. Jarchi explains it as the year in which Jair died. It may mean the very year in which the idolatries spoken of in ver. 6 were set up, so as to mark how closely God's chastisement followed the apostasy from him. They, *i. e.* the children of Ammon. *Eighteen years.* The same length as that of the Moabite servitude (ch. iii. 18). *The land of the JUDGES.*

Amorites, i. e. the territory of Sihon king of the Amorites, and Og the king of Bashan (Numb. xxxii. 33). *In Gilead*—in its widest acceptation, including, as in Deut. xxxiv. 1; Josh. xxii. 9, 13, 15; Judges xx. 1, the whole country held by the Amorites on the east of Jordan, and given to Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh. But in its narrower and stricter sense Gilead was bounded on the north by Bashan proper, and on the south by the *Mishor*, or plain of Medeba, which lay between the valley of Heshbon and the river Arnon, thus excluding that part of the territory of Reuben from Gilead (see Josh. xiii. 9—11). Originally, as we learn from ch. xi. 13—22, the territory bounded by the Arnon on the south, by the Jabbok on the north, by the wilderness on the east, and by the Jordan on the west, had belonged to Moab, but the Amorites had taken it from them before the conquest of Sihon by the Israelites.

Ver. 9.—*The children of Ammon, &c.* It would seem that at this time the king of the children of Ammon was also king of the Moabites, since he laid claim (ch. xi. 13, 24) to the land which had once belonged to Moab. If we may trust the king of the Ammonites' statement, the object of the war was to recover that land, and he carried the war across the Jordan into the territory of Judah and Ephraim in order to compel the Israelites to give it up.

Ver. 11.—*Did not I deliver you, &c.* These references to former deliverances are of great historical value, and not the least so as they allude to events of which the existing records give no account, or a very imperfect one. They show the existence of a real history in the background of that which has

been preserved in the Bible (see ch. viii. 13, note). From the Egyptians, as related at large in the Book of Exodus; from the Amorites, as related in Numb. xxi. 21—35; from the children of Ammon, who were confederate with the Moabites under Ehud, as we learn from ch. iii. 13; from the Philistines, as is briefly recorded in ch. iii. 31.

Ver. 12.—The Zidonians also. This allusion is not clear; it may mean the subjects of Jabin king of Canaan, as the northern Canaanites are called *Zidonians* in ch. xviii. 7; and this agrees with the order in which the deliverance from the Zidonians is here mentioned, next to that from the Philistines, and would be strengthened by the conjecture that has been made, that Harosheth (ch. iv. 2) was the great workshop in which the tributary Israelites wrought in cutting down timber, &c. for the Phœnician ships; or it may allude to some unrecorded oppression. The Amalekites, who were in alliance with the Midianites (ch. vi. 3, 33), as previously with the Moabites (ch. iii. 13) and with the Canaanites (ch. iv. 14), and whose signal defeat seems to have given the name to the mount of the Amalekites (ch. xii. 15). The Maonites. It is thought by many that the true reading is that preserved in the Septuagint, viz., the *Midianites*, which, being the greatest of all the foes of Israel, could scarcely be omitted here (see ch. vi., vii., viii.). If *Maonites* or *Maon* is the true reading, they would be the same people as the *Mehunim*, mentioned 2 Chron. xxvi. 7 (*Maon*, sing., and *Mounim*, plur.).

Ver. 16.—And they put away the strange gods. Here at length were “the fruits meet for repentance,” and “the returning to the Lord their God;” the intended result of the severe but loving correction (see Homiletics, ch. vi. 25—32). Cf. Gen. xxxv. 2; 1 Sam. vii. 8, in which passages, as here, the phrase *the strange gods* is the correct rendering; not, as in the margin, *gods of strangers*. The Hebrew phrase here rendered his soul was grieved occurs Numb. xxi. 4; Judges xvi. 16; Zech. xi. 2; it means *was impatient*—literally, *was shortened*, i. e. he could bear it no longer. A somewhat similar description of the Divine relenting is contained in the beautiful passage Hosea xi. 7—9.

Ver. 17.—This verse ought to begin the new chapter. The preliminary matter of

Israel's sin, of their oppression by the Ammonites, of their repentance and return to the God of their fathers, and of God's merciful acceptance of their penitence and prayer, was concluded in the last verse. The history of their deliverance by Jephthah begins here. And the children of Ammon, &c., i. e. they encamped, as they had done during the previous seventeen years, in Gilead, either to carry off the crops or to wring tribute from the people, or in some other way to oppress them, expecting no doubt to meet with tame submission as before. But a new spirit was aroused among the Israelites. By whatever channel the bitter reproach in vers. 11—14 had been conveyed to them, probably by the same channel, whether angel, or prophet, or high priest, had an answer of peace come to them on their repentance, and so they were roused and encouraged to resistance. As a first step, they encamped in Mizpeh (see ch. xi. 11, 29, 34). Mizpeh, or Mizpah of Gilead, is probably the same as Mizpah in Gilead where Laban and Jacob parted (Gen. xxxi. 25, 49); as Ramoth-Mizpeh (Josh. xiii. 26), called simply *Ramoth in Gilead* (Josh. xx. 8; 1 Chron. vi. 80); and as the place well known in later Israelite history as *Ramoth-Gilead* (1 Kings iv. 13; xxii. 3, 6), situated in the tribe of Gad, and a strong place of much importance. It was the place of national meeting for the whole of Gilead. *Mizpah* means *the watch-tower*, and would of course be upon a height, as the name *Ramoth-Mizpeh*, the heights of Mizpeh, also shows. It almost always preserves its meaning as an appellative, having the article prefixed, *ham-mizpah*, which is its usual form; only once *ham-mizpeh* (Josh. xv. 38), and *Mizpeh* (Josh. xi. 18; Judges xi. 29; 1 Sam. xxii. 3), and once *Mizpah* (Hosea v. 1). Whether Mizpeh in ch. xx. 1—3 is the same will be considered in the note to that passage. The modern site is not identified with certainty; it is thought to be es-Salt.

Ver. 18.—Gilead. See note to ver. 8. The people and princes. There is no *and* in the Hebrew. It is perhaps better, therefore, to take the words in apposition, as meaning, *And the assembly of the chiefs of Gilead*. The first step was to find a competent leader, and they agreed to appoint such an one, if he could be found, as their permanent head and captain.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 6—18.—*The Ethiopian's unchanged skin*. Among the invaluable lessons of Holy Scripture, not the least valuable is the insight given by its histories into the true nature of the human heart. “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked,” is the prophet's description of the heart of man, and the history of the Israelites is a signal illustration of its truth. We are apt to think that if we had passed through the waters of the Red Sea, and seen Mount Sinai on a blaze, and

eaten the manna from heaven, and drank the water out of the stony rock, and been led to victory by a Joshua, a Barak, a Deborah, or a Gideon, we never could have forgotten such signal mercies, could never have been unfaithful to the gracious Author of them, could never have preferred the vain idols of the heathen to the living God. Still more do we think that if we had seen the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth, had heard his wondrous words and seen his mighty works, or had been witnesses of his cross and passion, and talked with him after his resurrection, we should not be the worldly, lukewarm disciples we now are. But we are wrong in thinking so. The image of the human heart reflected in the history of the Israelite people is a more true and faithful one than that portrayed by our own self-love. And that image is one of the depraved human will constantly deflecting from rectitude, constantly drawn aside from truth and godliness by the power of selfish affections and corrupt lusts; occasionally, as it were, turned back toward God, either by strong influences from without, as stirring events, heavy chastisements, striking deliverances, powerful examples, faithful warnings; or by strong emotions from within, as fear, or gratitude, or hope; but as soon as these influences begin to cool, regularly returning to their old habit of thinking and acting, and falling back into their own evil ways. The particular kind of sins to which the heart is most prone varies indeed in different ages of the world, and with the different conditions of the human society. With the Israelites it was idolatry. The fascination of the heathen idols was incredibly strong. In spite of reason, in spite of experience, often of the most bitter kind, they were attracted to the rites of heathenism by the strongest sympathies of their own perverse hearts. While they shrunk from the lofty obligations of the holy service of God, they abandoned themselves with willingness of mind to the base servitude of the idols, consenting to their shameful requirements, and gloating in their abominable rites. The desire to be like the nations, the influence of example all around them, the mysterious power of superstition, the agreement between their sensual hearts and the sensual rites of idolatry, were forces steadily turning them away from God, and constantly prevailing over the temporary influences which from time to time had moved them to repentance. But it is just the same with other kinds of sin which strike their roots deep into the hearts of men, and find a ready consent in the diseased moral conditions of those hearts. For a moment perhaps their power may be weakened by some opposite force, but, unless the fountain of the will is really renewed and sweetened by the indwelling Spirit of God, the same spectacle will be exhibited, as in the case of the Israelites, of the character which had been forced back returning surely and steadily to its natural bent; of the old influences of pride, selfishness, and lust resuming their former sway; and of the previous tastes, and manners, and ways of life being restored to their old supremacy. And it will be found that neither reason, nor experience, nor common sense, nor even self-interest, are able to prevent this. The Ethiopian cannot change his skin, nor the leopard his spots. No more can they do good that are accustomed to do evil (Jer. xiii. 23). The evil bent of a corrupt nature will ever be towards evil. It is the knowledge of the evil that is in us, and the consequent distrust of ourselves, which is the first real step towards a lasting change. Not till this evil is experimentally felt do the two great doctrines of the gospel, atonement for sin by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and regeneration by the Holy Spirit of God, assume real significance and value in our eyes. When it is known and felt, the inestimable blessing of forgiveness of sin is known and valued too. So is the all-sufficient grace of the Holy Ghost. Then too comes watchfulness against the deceit and treachery of the heart; then a steady striving against sin; then a firm resolution not to open the heart to the subtle influences of sin, but rather to crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts; and so what was impossible to unassisted nature becomes an actuality through God's all-sufficient grace. The Ethiopian skin is transformed to a holy whiteness, the leopard's spots are done away, the corrupt heart is renewed in holiness after the image of God, and the old man becomes a new creature in Christ Jesus the Lord.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 6.—*Recurring habits of evil.* The external peace and order do not break the entail of evil habit—"they continued to do evil."

I. OBSERVANCE OF EXTERNAL DECENCIES OF LIFE IS NO SAFEGUARD AGAINST INBRED DEPRAVITY. Only the hearty love and service of God. Probably the "whoring after other gods" began beneath the cloak of an orthodox worship. For a certain time material prosperity may consist with religious laxity.

II. BESETTING SINS, UNREPENTED OF, ASSUME MORE AGGRAVATED PHASES. Like the man out of whom the devil had been cast, which, returning from the "dry places," and finding his heart "empty, swept, and garnished," "bringeth seven other devils," &c. It was an idolatrous confusion; there could be no rationale of these systems, harmonising them with the conscience, or even with one another. All sense of niceness has deserted Israel. It plunges heedlessly into a sea of obscurity and filth.—M.

Vers. 7—10.—*Immediate and effectual retribution.* I. IN THE PUNISHMENT INFLICTED THE CALAMITY WAS CLEARLY CONNECTED WITH THE SIN. 1. *The sin committed is at once followed by penalty.* 2. *The punishment lasts whilst the transgression is unrepented of.* 3. *The seducers become the instruments of punishment.*

II. THE UNHELPLESSNESS OF IDOLATRY WAS EXPOSED. The Ammonites, whose unholy practices they had copied, take advantage of their weakness, and pitilessly despoil and harass them. The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel. Of all the gods they had served, Baal, Molech, Astarte, &c., not one could deliver them. Only Jehovah can hear, and to him they are at last driven. Even Gilead—the heroic land—is rendered helpless before the despised Ammon, as if to show that real bravery is a moral quality. And the old "fear of Israel" which kept the heathen nations back was gone. The Ammonites wax bold, and cross the Jordan even into Judah.—M.

Vers. 10—14.—*God answering hardened transgressors.* He seems to deny the petition. Is this capricious? There is surely not only cause for it, but a purpose working through it.

I. THE AIM OF THE SEVERITY IS TO AWAKEN TRUE REPENTANCE. Inconvenience, discomfort, distress, humiliation may all be felt without true repentance. The latter arises from sorrow for and hatred of sin as sin.

II. THIS IS SECURED BY—1. *An appeal to memory of manifold deliverances and mercies.* 2. *Holding the sinner under the yoke of his own choosing when he no longer chooses it.* 3. *The temporary horror and despair of rejection.* "I will deliver you no more."—M.

Vers. 15, 16.—*Works meet for repentance.* A wonderful summary; an evangelical anticipation.

I. IN WHAT THESE CONSIST. 1. *Heartfelt sorrow and confession of sin.* 2. *Absolute yielding of oneself into the hands of God.* 3. *Forsaking the sins that have deceived and destroyed.* 4. *Serving Jehovah with new obedience and zeal.*

II. HOW THESE APPEAL TO THE MIND OF GOD. "His soul was grieved for (literally, endured no longer) the misery of Israel." The alternate hardening and melting of God's soul an accommodation to man's conceptions and feelings; yet with a reality corresponding to them in the Divine nature. They have a disciplinary effect, and their succession is impressive. So God "repents." To our heavenly Father the proofs of our sincerity are an irresistible petition. He welcomes the first signs of true repentance, and leads it forth into saving faith. The truly repentant were never yet rejected. In working this repentance in their minds he began to answer their prayer even whilst rejecting it.—M.

Vers. 17, 18.—*Faith restoring courage and might.* I. BY PROMOTING THE UNITY OF GOD'S PEOPLE. The worship of Jehovah is the uniting and inspiring principle. All other worship disunites and weakens. The very site of their camp was instinct with solemn, Divine associations.

II. ENABLING THEM TO FACE RESOLUTELY THE GREATEST TROUBLES OF LIFE. Israel is in the field against Ammon, a circumstance full of meaning. When the Spirit of

God enters a man he looks upon difficulties with a new resolution. It enables him "to take arms against a sea of troubles, and by opposing, end them."

III. RENDERING THEM WILLING TO ACCEPT THE LEADER GOD SHALL INDICATE. It is no lusting after a king now. The only King is Jehovah. But a leader and judge is sought. So the true Christian will reverence and follow all who are inspired and appointed by God.—M.

Ver. 10.—*From God to Baal.* I. MAN MUST HAVE SOME RELIGION. If God is forsaken, Baal is followed. The soul cannot endure a void. This temple must always have some deity in it. If the higher religion is rejected, a lower superstition will take the place of it. The decay of the national religion of old Rome was accompanied by the adoption of strange Oriental cults, and by the spread of a religion of magic. Modern scepticism gives birth to extraordinary forms of superstition—religions of nature, of humanity, of spiritualism. Accordingly, the effort to attain freedom by escaping from the restraints of Christianity is a delusion, and ends only in the bondage of some lower influence. The soul must have some master, and if it rebels against God it will serve Baal, mammon, the world, the flesh, or the devil. True liberty is only found in willing obedience, in the submission of love, in sympathy with the mind of God, in delighting in his law. Perfect freedom of will arises from perfect harmony between our will and God's will, so that we gladly desire what he requires (Ps. xl. 8).

II. SIN HAS TWO LEADING FEATURES, A POSITIVE AND A NEGATIVE. It is forsaking God and serving Baalim; omission and commission. The tendency is to regard one of these two much to the neglect of the other. Over-scrupulous people are very sensitive about the minutest act of positive wrong, but sometimes indifferent in regard to the neglect of duty. Energetic people often make the opposite mistake, and show great anxiety to do good service, while they are not sufficiently careful to avoid hasty acts of a questionable character. These two sides of sin are closely connected. Devotion to God is the great safeguard to purity; when this grows cold the soul is open to the attack of temptation, leading to direct transgression. On the other hand, positive sin is poison to religious faith. The commission of evil deeds inclines us to the omission of duties. Impurity paralyses zeal. We cannot serve God while we are serving Baalim.

III. CONDUCT ALWAYS TENDS TO RUN INTO EXTREMES. We serve God or Baalim, light or darkness, good or evil. There is no middle course. There appears to be more variety, gradation, and mixed character in life than is allowed for in Scripture (e. g. 1 John iii. 8—10). But life is only yet beginning to develop, its true nature will be seen in eternity. Two seeds may look much alike, and the first sprouts from them may not be very dissimilar, yet the gardener who knows the natural history of the plants, judging by their whole growth, may pronounce them to be very different. In this early growth of the soul's life on earth, the great question is, What tendencies does it show? The twilight of sunrise looks very like the twilight of sunset, yet the one is the prophecy of day and the other the portent of night. Two streams which flow from one watershed are at first near together, yet if one is running east and the other west, they may come at last to be divided by a whole continent, and to end in two separate oceans. We must be moving in one or other of two directions. The question is, Are we going to the light or from the light, to God or from God? The tendency determines the character of the life, and this must be justly estimated by the full issues involved in the tendency, not by the present early stages of it. Thus we are all children of the light or children of the darkness, ripening into saintly servants of God or corrupting into wretched slaves of sin.—A.

Vers. 13, 14.—*The test of trouble.* I. WE ALL NEED A REFUGE FOR TROUBLE. Life is so mixed that even to the happiest it is full of disappointments and anxieties. Though it may be smooth at present, we know that it cannot continue so for ever. The storm must fall at some time on every soul that is making the voyage of life. "Man is born to trouble" (Job v. 7). The self-assurance that suffices us in prosperity will not be enough when the tribulation comes. Some refuge every soul must then seek.

II. THE GREAT REFUGE FOR TROUBLE IS IN RELIGION. This is not the sole function of religion. It is also a light, an inspiration, an authority. But all men who have a religion turn to it as their supreme haven when the storms drive. We are naturally religious. Instinctively we look up—if not to the light, then to the darkness, the mystery, the unknown above us.

III. THE VALUE OF RELIGION IS TESTED BY ITS EFFICACY AS A REFUGE IN TROUBLE. The breakwater is tested by the storm; the armour is tried by the combat; the medicine is proved by the disease; the consolation is revealed by the distress. If the lamp of our religion will only burn while the sun of prosperity shines, and goes out when the night of adversity closes in, it is worthless. Men make gods of their pleasures, their business, their science. What can the husk of old pleasures do in the "winter of discontent," when no new pleasure can be evoked? What will the idols money, fame, knowledge avail in the agony of the wreck of a life's hopes, in the mystery of death and eternity? How foolish to be engrossed in pursuits which will leave us destitute in the hour of our greatest need!

IV. IF WE HAVE NOT SUBMITTED TO THE TRUE RELIGION IN PROSPERITY WE HAVE NO RIGHT TO EXPECT TO ENJOY THE REFUGE OF IT IN ADVERSITY. There are men who postpone attention to the claims of Christ till the time of trouble, and find no way to him when they most need him. They will "make their peace with God" on their death-bed. But this is not so easy as they suppose. Apart from the wickedness and insult to God which such conduct implies, it is also the height of folly, and is based on a complete misconception of the first elements of true religion. It is true that God is willing to receive us whenever we honestly return to him in repentance; but (1) the selfish terror of approaching calamity is not repentance; (2) genuine repentance, involving a change of desire, is not easily created by selfish fear; (3) it is not well that men should too readily escape from all the consequences of their sins.—A.

Vers. 15, 16.—*Repentance.* I. REPENTANCE INVOLVES CONFESSION OF SIN. The people admit their guilt to themselves and declare it frankly to God. 1. *We must confess sin.* We cannot turn from sin till we are conscious of sin. God will not forgive our sin till we confess our guilt. These two things, the self-knowledge and the self-revelation before God, which are implied in confession, must be found in true repentance. Pride would simply forget the past, but this cannot be forgotten till it is forgiven, nor forgiven till it is confessed (1 John i. 9). 2. *The confession must be to God;* because (1) it is against God that sin is committed; (2) he alone can forgive sin; (3) we have no warrant for believing that he delegates this Divine prerogative to any human deputy.

II. REPENTANCE INVOLVES SUBMISSION TO GOD. No repentance is complete which does not involve self-renunciation. This is necessary, (1) because, since sin arises from self-will and rebellion against the will of God, the return from sin must be marked by a return to obedience; (2) because the penitent is conscious of his utter ill desert, and of his absolute dependence on the mercy of God, so that he dares claim nothing but what God may think fit to give him, and knows that at the worst this can be no harder than what he merits; and (3) because repentance involves the admission that while we were sinful and foolish in forsaking God, he was always good to us, and will never do for us anything short of what is best. Repentance thus recognises again the despised fatherhood of God, and willingly trusts to his grace.

III. REPENTANCE INVOLVES PRACTICAL AMENDMENT. The children of Israel put away the strange gods from among them, and served the Lord. If repentance is genuine it will show itself in conduct—it will bring forth fruits (Matt. iii. 8). This does not imply—1. That we must complete the reformation of our own lives before God will forgive us, because (1) that is impossible (Jer. xiii. 23); and (2) the very object of the gospel is to do this—i. e. to save us from our sins (Acts iii. 26). 2. Neither does it imply that any measure of reformation will be regarded as penance, as sacrifice, as a meritorious work securing forgiveness, since the essence of forgiveness lies in its freeness. But it implies that the genuineness of repentance must be tested by its effects. Repentance is not a mere feeling of grief; it is not seated in the emotions, but in the will. It is a change of desire, and the wish to do better.

This is active, and must manifest itself in conduct. The conduct will be twofold: (1) the giving up of old evil ways, and (2) the commencement of the service of God.

IV. REPENTANCE IS FOLLOWED BY TOKENS OF GOD'S MERCY. When the people repented God could no longer endure their misery. He never willingly afflicts (Lam. iii. 33). He only waits for our repentance to show his compassion. It is possible then because (1) there is no longer the necessity for continued chastisement; (2) the justice and righteousness of God no longer require him to look upon us in wrath; and (3) we shall not be injured by the kindness which falls upon us in our humiliation, but rather healed and strengthened for a better life by the influence of God's love.—A.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XI.

Vers. 1—11.—The narrative here goes back probably some years, to explain the antecedents of Jephthah, who was about to play so prominent a part in the ensuing history. Jephthah we learn was a bastard son of Gilead by a foreign harlot, an Aramiteess, if there is any connection between this verse and 1 Chron. vii. 14; and when the sons of Gilead's wife were grown up, they expelled Jephthah, and refused to let him have any share in the inheritance of their father, because he was the son of a foreigner; Jephthah therefore fled from Gilead, and took up his residence in the land of Tob, apparently an Aramean settlement (2 Sam. x. 6, 8), and presumably the land of his mother's birth, where he gathered round him "vain men" (ch. ix. 4), and became a famous freebooter. There he was at the time of the Ammonite invasion mentioned in ch. x. 17, and thither the Gileadites sent for him to come and be their captain, after the consultation in ch. x. 18, with the promise that if he came he should be the head or prince of all the inhabitants of Gilead. After some demur he agreed, and came, and was installed as head of the State at the Gileadite metropolis of Mizpah (ch. x. 17, note).

Ver. 1.—*Jephthah the Gileadite.* Gilead has two meanings: it is the name of the country so called (ch. x. 8, note), and it is the name of the son or descendant of Machir the son of Manasseh (1 Chron. vii. 14, 17; Numb. xxvi. 29, 30). *Gileadite* also may be explained in two ways: it may mean an inhabitant of Gilead (ch. x. 18), or it may mean a member of the family of the Gileadites, either an actual son or a more remote descendant of Gilead (Numb. xxvi. 29)—two meanings which would usually coincide. *Gilead begat Jephthah.* Here *Gilead* must mean

the person so called, *i. e.* the son or descendant of Machir, from whom the family, including Jephthah, were called Gileadites; but whether son or descendant cannot positively be affirmed. All that is certain is that he was that one of Machir's descendants who was the head of that division of the Manassites who were called *Gileadites*. Again, when it is said *Gilead begat Jephthah*, we cannot be certain whether it is meant that Gilead was Jephthah's father, or merely his ancestor (see ch. x. 8, note).

Ver. 2.—*And Gilead's wife.* Whenever Gilead lived, besides the son by the foreign harlot, whom Jephthah represented, he had sons and descendants by his legitimate wife, who claimed to be his sole heirs, and who therefore drove Jephthah from the inheritance of their father's house. They might, as far as the language used is concerned, have been Gilead's own sons, or they may have been his grandsons or great-grandsons, and so either the brothers or the cousins and fellow-tribesmen of Jephthah.

Ver. 3.—*The land of Tob.* This is certainly the same country as is spoken of in *Ish-tob*, *i. e.* the men of Tob, of whom 12,000 were hired by the children of Ammon to fight against David. They are thus named side by side with the men of Beth-Rehob, and Zoba, and Maacah, other small Aramean or Syrian states (2 Sam. x. 6, 8). Tob is again mentioned in all probability in 1 Macc. v. 18; 2 Macc. xii. 17, and the *Tharaba* of Ptolemy agrees in situation as well as in name with Tob, but no identification with any existing place has been hitherto effected. *Vain men*, as in ch. ix. 4.

Ver. 4.—This verse brings us back to ch. x. 17, and reunites the two streams of narrative.

Ver. 5.—*The elders of Gilead.* The same as the princes in ch. x. 18.

Ver. 6.—*Our captain.* A military term, as in Josh. x. 24. It is also used in Isa. i. 10 for the *rulers* of Sodom.

Ver. 7.—*Did not ye hate me, &c.* Jephthah's reproach to the "elders of Gilead" strongly favours the idea that "his brethren"

in ver. 3, and the "father's house" in ver. 2, are to be taken in the wider sense of fellow-tribesmen and "house of fathers," and that his expulsion was not the private act of his own brothers turning him out of the house they lived in, but a tribal act (taking *tribe* in the sense of *house of fathers*), in which the elders of Gilead had taken a part. If this is so, it removes a great difficulty about Jephthah being Gilead's son, which it is very hard to reconcile with chronology.

Ver. 9.—*Shall I be, &c.* There is no interrogative in the Hebrew. The words may be taken as the laying down of the condition by Jephthah, to which in the following verse the elders express their assent.

Ver. 11.—*Head and captain.* Both civil ruler or judge, and military chief. Uttered all his words before the Lord. The expression "before the Lord" is used in Exod. xxxiv. 34; Levit. i. 3; Judges xxi. 2 (*before God*), and elsewhere, to signify the special presence of the Lord which was to be found in the tabernacle, or with the ark, or where there was the priest with an ephod. And this must be the meaning of the expression here. Jephthah was installed at the national place of gathering and consultation for Gilead, viz., at Mizpah in Gilead, into his office as head of the State, and there, as in the capital, he performed all his duties under the sanctions of religion. Whether, however, the ark was brought there, or the altar, or a priest with an ephod, or whether some substitute was devised which the unsettled times might justify, it is impossible to say from want of information. There seems to be some reference in the words to Jephthah's vow, in ver. 31, as one of such utterances.

Ver. 12.—*And Jephthah sent, &c.* His first attempt was to make an honourable peace by showing that there was no just cause of quarrel. *What hast thou to do with me?* or, rather, *What business, what cause of quarrel, is there between you and me?* (he speaks in the name of Israel, as head of the State) what is it all about?

Ver. 13.—*And the king, &c.* The Ammonite king stated his ground of quarrel very distinctly. He claimed the land between the Arnon and the Jabbok as Ammonitish or Moabitish territory, and demanded its surrender as the only condition of peace. It appears from Josh. xiii. 25 that part of the land of the tribe of Gad, that, namely, "on the western side of the upper Jabbok," had once belonged to the Ammonites, but had been conquered by the Amorites, from whom Israel took it, together with that which had formerly belonged to the Moabites.

Ver. 16.—*When Israel came up, &c.* In this and the following verses there is a distinct reference to the history in Numbers

and Deuteronomy, and in some instances verbal quotations. Thus in this verse the words below which are put in italics are found in Numb. xiii. 26; xiv. 25: *Israel . . . walked through the wilderness unto the Red Sea, and came to Kadesh.*

Ver. 17.—*Then Israel sent messengers unto the king of Edom, saying, Let me, I pray thee, pass through thy land (country in A. V. Numb. xx. 17).* The words in italics are found in Numb. xx. 14, 17. *And Israel abode in Kadesh.* These words are in Numb. xx. 1; see also Deut. i. 46. *The king of Edom would not hearken.* This is related in substance in Numb. xx. 18—21. *And in like manner they sent unto the king of Moab.* There is no mention of this in the Mosaic narrative. The knowledge of it must have been preserved either by tradition or in some other now lost writings; perhaps in the Book of the Wars of the Lord (Numb. xxi. 14). It is in itself very probable that such a message should have been sent to the king of Moab, whose territories Israel was forbidden to meddle with (Deut. ii. 9, 19).

Ver. 18.—*Then they went along, &c.* The narrative here follows Deut. ii. 1. *For they compassed the land of Edom.* Deut. ii. 1 has, "*we compassed Mount Seir*;" but Numb. xxi. 4 has, "*to compass the land of Edom.*" By the east side—literally, by the sun-rising side, as in Numb. xxi. 11. *They pitched on the other side of Arnon.* The identical words occur in Numb. xxi. 13. *For Arnon was the border of Moab.* The identical words of Numb. xxi. 13, where it is added, "*between Moab and the Amorites.*" South of the Arnon belonged to Moab, and north to the Amorites. The route taken by the Israelites is carefully traced (Numb. xxi. 11—20).

Ver. 19.—*And Israel, &c.* The text here follows Numb. xxi. 21—24 almost verbatim; but the expression, "*the king of Heshbon,*" is from Deut. ii. 24, 26, 30.

Ver. 20.—*In Jahaz.* Otherwise *Jahazah* (Numb. xxi. 23; Deut. ii. 32; Isa. xv. 4; Jer. xlviii. 21, 34). It seems to have lain immediately to the north of the Arnon.

Vers. 21, 22.—These verses are an epitome of Numb. xxi. 24—32. Cf. also Deut. ii. 33—36. *The wilderness* is the country lying east of Moab up to the hill country (see ch. x. 8, note). From the Arnon to the Jabbok is the measurement from south to north; from the wilderness to the Jordan, from east to west.

Ver. 24.—*Chemosh.* The national god of the Moabites (cf. Numb. xxi. 29; 1 Kings xi. 7, 33; Jer. xlviii. 7, 13, 46, &c.). *Thy god.* The phrase indicates a very close connection between Moab and Ammon at the present time, both possibly being under one king. *Chemosh, rather than Moloch, is*

mentioned because the territory had belonged to the Moabites, but Chemosh had not been able to save it from the Amorites. **The Lord our God.** Jehovah was the God of Israel as truly as Chemosh was the god of Moab, in one sense. Possibly Jephthah had not risen to the conception of Jehovah as the God of the whole earth.

Ver. 25.—**Art thou anything better, &c.** Jephthah now advances another argument to prove the justice of his cause and the unreasonableness of the Ammonite claim. If the territory in question was Moabite property, how came it that Balak laid no claim to it? He was an enemy of the Israelites, and yet when Israel took possession of the land, and dwelt in Heshbon, its capital, and the daughter cities or villages thereof, and in Aroer and her daughter cities or villages, and in all the cities on the banks of the Arnon, Balak never strove about them with Israel, or went to war to recover them—a plain proof that he did not look upon them as his property. If they were his, that was the time to claim and recover them, but he had not done so.

Ver. 26.—The occupation of the cities and villages referred to is related in Numb. xxi. 23 and following verses, and in Deut. ii. 36; see too Josh. xii. 2. **Aroer** is not mentioned among the cities of Moab taken by the Amorites in the ancient book quoted in Numb. xxi. 27—30, and it has been conjectured that it may have been built by the Amorites to secure their new frontier. It is described by Eusebius and Jerome in the 'Onomasticon' as built on a hill overhanging the bank of the Arnon, and a ruin called **Araïr** has been found on the very spot so described. The **Aroer** mentioned in ver. 33 (where see note) is probably a different place. **By the coasts of Arnon, i. e. on the**

banks. The Septuagint for **Arnon** reads **Jordan**, which was the western boundary, as **Arnon** was the southern (ver. 22). The corresponding description in Deut. ii. 36 is, *From Aroer, which is by the brink of the river of Arnon, and from the city that is by the river, even unto Gilead, there was not one city too strong for us: the Lord our God delivered all unto us. Three hundred years.* These words seem quite unintelligible and out of place. They are also chronologically impracticable. One expects the number of the cities, as in ver. 33, rather than the number of years; and it is remarkable that the whole number of cities taken by the Israelites on the east of Jordan must have been just about 300, since the half-tribe of Manasseh had sixty. If Gad and Reuben had the same proportion, it would be exactly 300 (5×60). **Within that time.** The Hebrew phrase, which occurs about seventy times, invariably means *at that time*, and here can only refer to the time of the first settlement in the days of Balak, of which he had been speaking—another proof that the enumeration *three hundred years* is out of place here. If the reading *years* is not, as above suggested, an error for *cities*, the whole sentence, *three hundred years*, may very probably be an interpolation by a professed chronologist. The adding up of all the numbers of the servitudes and rests given in the book gives 301 years from the commencement of the oppression by Chushan-rishathaim to the death of Jair. But this method of reckoning gives the impossible period of 600 years from the exodus to the building of the temple.

Ver. 27.—Jephthah now asserts his own entire blamelessness, and appeals to the justice of God to decide between him and the Ammonites.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—28.—*The controversy.* The first element of peace, whether in private or in national controversies, whether in civil or religious disputes, is the genuine desire to be fair. When men have that spirit of justice that they do not desire to claim anything which is not really theirs, or to withhold from their opponents anything that is their due; when their aim is to ascertain what is true, and not to overbear truth by force; when they strive for truth, and not merely for victory—there is a fair chance of both sides arriving at the same result, and so being at peace. The first step in any dispute, therefore, should be a calm and careful examination of the facts of the case. It should not be taken for granted that the views which self-interest, or personal predilection, or party prejudice, incline us to are the right ones, but we should remember that our opponents have equal rights with ourselves, and that it is at least possible that their predilections and prejudices may rest upon as good grounds as our own. A fair and impartial examination of the facts of the case is therefore the first step in every controversy; and that the examination may be fair, we should patiently allow our opponent to state his own case in his own way. The same fact may wear a different aspect according to the mode of stating it, and according to the side of it which is brought prominently into view. Thus Jephthah acted fairly

when he asked the king of the sons of Ammon to state the grounds on which he invaded Israel, and when on his side he refuted that statement by an historical retrospect of the transactions in question. Though, however, the spirit of fairness gives the best chance of an amicable settlement of controversies, it does not always lead to such a settlement. Often fairness on one side is met by prejudice and unfairness on the other. But even when both parties are actuated by the like desire of getting at the rights of a question, it may happen that there is that measure of doubt in some matter on which the controversy hinges, that honest minds may differ about it, and that it is inevitable that men's different interests, prepossessions, and prejudices, should incline them different ways. Thus in Jephthah's controversy with the Ammonites there was room for doubt how far the defeat and dispossession of the children of Ammon by the Amorites had for ever extinguished the claim of the former to the ownership of the land. That Israel had not taken the land from the children of Ammon, or displayed any hostility towards them, was undoubtedly true. But it did not necessarily follow that the Ammonite claim was wholly unrighteous. The question how long a time it takes to establish or to invalidate ownership is obviously a debateable one, in the decision of which personal feelings will carry much weight. In the Franco-German war of 1870 the Germans no doubt felt about Alsace and Lorraine that even 200 years possession by France had not wholly abrogated the German rights. And so it may have been with the king of the children of Ammon. He may have thought that he was justified in claiming the land which had once belonged to his people; and the matter could only be decided by the arbitrament of war. The practical lesson, however, to be learnt is, in all the business of life, whether in politics, or commerce, or in social intercourse, or in religion, to cultivate a spirit of fairness. In religious controversies especially the value of fairness, with a view to truth, and to the peace of the Church, cannot be overrated. It is as humiliating to our Christian character as it is prejudicial to the real interests of religion, when men approach religious questions in a spirit of heated partisanship, seeking only to crush their opponents by ridicule, or abuse, or vehemence, and treating them with insult and indignity. It is no less painful to see falsehood, and suppression of truth, and pious frauds, imported into controversies, the professed object of which is to vindicate the glory of God and the truth of his holy word. If religious controversialists would approach all subjects of difference in a spirit of thorough fairness, would look at their adversaries' arguments with a sincere desire to understand and appreciate them, would give due weight to them, and would believe it possible that they may have reason and justice on their side, there would be a good chance of agreement on many points which now keep Christians hopelessly asunder. And if there should remain some points on which temperament, or education, or habits of thought, in different men, were too diverse to admit of unanimity on doubtful points, then heavenly charity would step forward and maintain that agreement in love which could not be attained in opinion. The unity of the spirit would not be broken, the peace of the Church would not be violated, and the enemies of the gospel would not find their way to victory through the divisions and hatreds of the servants of one Lord. May the Spirit of God come as a Spirit of fairness upon all that name the name of Jesus Christ!

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—3.—*The shaping influences of life.* These different in their nature from that of which the poet speaks—"There's a divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we will" (*Hamlet*, V. ii.). It is an anticipative part they play. In many lives the manner in which they are thus influenced is apparent; but even when otherwise the effect is none the less powerful and lasting. It has been questioned whether this be not the most important part of the work of creation. Of these influences, notice—

I. HOW STRONG AND VARIED THEY ARE. 1. *In Jephthah's birth.* He was a child of shame, the fruit of an age of licentiousness and idolatry. He receives the title Gileadite, yet it is said Gilead was his father; he must therefore either have had a father with such a name, a member of the tribe of Manasseh, living in Gilead, or,

having no clear proof of his paternity, have received the tribal name in that relation. A foundling, with a shameful mystery lying behind his life. 2. *In the behaviour of men towards him.* Those who were his brethren according to the flesh acted a most unbrotherly part. Either from selfishness or a false feeling of shame, they expelled him from his father's house, closing the door of peaceful, honourable toil, and compelling him to resort to a career of bloodshed and irregularity. The very men who might, any of them, have committed a like sin to that of Jephthah's father are forward to rid themselves of its results. The world judges of men rather from their misfortunes than from their personal misdeeds. And where nature has been unkind, "man's inhumanity to man" is only the more signal. A social stigma is worse to bear up against than many of the greatest calamities which do not involve it. 3. *In the force of his circumstances as they arose.* He is compelled to take up his abode in a far off border town, near to Ammon, the hereditary enemy of Israel, and surrounded by the conditions of a desert life, where he had to be "a law unto himself." A life of guerilla warfare, with its comparatively loose *morale*, is thrust upon him. Men of like misfortune and disposition, all more or less compromised with their tribes or nations, gather about him, and look to him for direction and initiative. But—

II. **NEVERTHELESS, THEY DO NOT DETERMINE DESTINY.** He has somehow managed to preserve a measure of morality and religious observance, even in that wilderness stronghold. The worship of Jehovah is maintained, and the heart of the chieftain beats true to all the traditions of Israel. His personal influence and warlike prowess are at its service. His greatest exploits are not those of the private marauder, but of the patriot. It is character alone that determines destiny, and character is in our own keeping. One is continually meeting with such people—people who in difficult circumstances are yet kept on the whole pure and faithful. Such were "they of Cæsar's household." And—

III. **IF RIGHTLY ENCOUNTERED THEY MAY REDOUND TO ADVANTAGE AND HONOUR.** In the hour of Israel's need, repentant and humble, its elders approach the outlaw whom they had expelled. The man himself is not prepared for the singular conversion. He questions them suspiciously, nay, with all his magnanimity, reminds them of their different behaviour in years gone by. They admit all; but they are too humbled to make evasion and to conceal their real motive. He is master of the situation. His whole previous training and reputation now stand him in good stead, and he understands a little of God's dealings with him. The Bible is full of instances of men who have gained power and fame through the overcoming of difficulties. Time and God are on the side of them who, notwithstanding temptation, are found faithful. And is there not One who outshines all others in this? "The stone which the builders rejected is become the head stone of the corner." His career is our incentive and example (Phil. ii. 5—11). Have not all rejected Christ? In our need let us go to him, a nobler than Jephthah.—M.

Vers. 4—11.—*Magnanimity of patriotism.* In the behaviour of Jephthah on this occasion we have a noble illustration of the blending of the religious and the patriotic spirit.

I. **PERSONAL WRONGS ARE FORGIVEN.** He might have brooded over them, sulked, and rejoiced over the elders in their trouble. But he felt that his country's distress was not a time or occasion for revenging the contumely and wrong that were past. This is the true spirit of the patriot. The individual is lost in the commonwealth.

II. **HIS COUNTRY'S NEED IS GENEROUSLY RESPONDED TO.** What an opportunity for an unprincipled, irreligious man! He might have turned Israel's loss to his own gain.

III. **HIS OWN FORTUNES ARE LOST SIGHT OF IN THE GREATER AMBITION OF BEING THE SAVIOUR OF HIS COUNTRY.** Rank he does not value. He refuses leadership until it is shown that he is the Divinely revealed leader. He gives all the honour to Jehovah. From that moment he was at the service of his people, and the unselfish "servant of Jehovah." Men are found who will behave thus for earthly fatherlands and temporal attachments. Often the human tie and the Divine conflict. Jephthah was serving God and country at once. The Christian will serve his friends and his country best

by serving God first. How dear should the Church and kingdom of God on earth be to us! All other considerations should be lost sight of in the zeal for our Master's glory.—M.

Ver. 11.—*Recognition of God in positions of honour and responsibility.* How many would have at once swollen with self-conceit! &c. It is a test of the inner life of Jephthah. We may all be more or less tested in this way.

I. HE ENTERED UPON HIS GREAT TASK WITH A SENSE OF SOLEMN RESPONSIBILITY TO GOD. Mizpah was the reminder of an ancient covenant, and its associations are honoured.

II. HE MADE PUBLIC CONFESSION OF JEHOVAH.

III. HE LOOKED TO JEHOVAH FOR GUIDANCE AND HELP.—M.

Vers. 12—28.—*The model diplomatist.* I. THE PROFOUND SAGACITY AND SENSE OF INTERNATIONAL COURTESIES AND OBLIGATIONS DISPLAYED BY JEPHTHAH. An historical site is chosen, which had significance to all the nations neighbouring upon it. At Mizpah had Jacob and Laban made solemn covenant. To their descendant nations the place could not but possess a religious interest. It was a distinct advantage, therefore, to take up his head-quarters there. All his soul is possessed by the old associations of the place. It appears even in his language (vers. 10, 11). This persistent reference to the place was a guarantee of good faith and brotherly feeling. He speaks of the gods of Ammon and Israel from a neutral point of view.

II. HIS APPEAL TO HISTORY. It is sacred history, with the seal of God upon it. He recounts the details of the conquest by Israel, so far as they are relevant; shows that their own land is held by that title, and asks why for 300 years Israel's occupancy of the disputed territory had not been contested. The example of Balak, who saw that it would be destruction for him to contend with Israel, and forbore, is quoted aptly. The geographical limits are carefully indicated.

III. ALL THIS WAS WORTH WHILE, *even with a heathen adversary.* It stated the case upon broad, intelligible grounds; it raised no irrelevant questions, but was conciliatory; and there was no attempt at compromise. It is a moral gain when a point in dispute is thus clearly and dispassionately argued. It did not avert war, but it justified it. *And Israel were strengthened and encouraged.* The people could grasp the outlines of this great claim. They could go forward with confidence that their cause was righteous, and therefore the cause of God. Disputes between individuals and nations should be settled—(1) upon common grounds and associations; (2) courteously and kindly; (3) with careful regard to facts; and (4) God should be the great Witness.—M.

Ver. 7.—*The friend in need.* I. THE VALUE OF A TRUE FRIEND IS SEEN IN THE TIME OF ADVERSITY. Jephthah was hated by the elders of Israel in prosperous times, but when trouble came he was discovered to be their best friend. The wise man will endeavour to cultivate the friendship of the good and great. It is foolish to let valued friends pass away from us through negligence or slight offence. There are few forms of earthly riches more valuable than that of a treasury of friendships. We may be careless of this in circumstances of ease; but if so, trouble will reveal our mistake. Christ is a Friend who sticketh closer than a brother, too often neglected in prosperity, but found to be the one needed Helper in the hour of darkness (Isa. xxxii. 2).

II. THE BEST FRIEND IS NOT ALWAYS THE MOST POPULAR. He may be poor, unpretending, eccentric, or dull. It is foolish to choose our friends by the superficial attractions of social amusement. The boon companion may prove a shallow friend. Sterling qualities of fidelity, self-denying devotion, &c. are not always accompanied by brilliant conversational gifts and such other pleasing characteristics as shine in festive scenes. Christ, the best of friends, was despised and rejected of men. It may be that the very excellency of the friend is the cause of his unpopularity. He will not lend himself to low pursuits, and so is considered morose; he refuses to flatter our weakness,—perhaps bravely and disinterestedly rebukes our faults,—and is therefore thought censorious and offensive; he aims at raising us to what is worthy

of our efforts, and is voted "a bore." The time of trouble will destroy this unjust estimate, but it would be more wise and generous in us to value our friends at all times for their best qualities, even though the sobriety of them may appear dull.

III. THE TRUE FRIEND WILL NOT REFUSE HELP IN NEED, ALTHOUGH HE MAY HAVE RECEIVED UNWORTHY TREATMENT IN PROSPEROUS TIMES. Jephthah naturally reproaches the elders of Israel, but he is too noble to refuse to come to their help. True friendship is generous, unselfish, and forgiving. It does not stand "on its rights," "on its dignity." It is more concerned with the welfare of those in whom it is interested than with their deserts. The patriot will not let his country suffer because he is personally piqued at the conduct of its leaders. The Christian should learn not to injure the cause of Christ through the pride and offence which the wrong conduct of responsible persons in the Church may excite. Israel is larger than the elders of Israel. The Church is greater than her doctors and ministers. Jephthah is a type of Christ, who does not refuse to help us though we have rejected him in the past.—A.

EXPOSITION.

Ver. 29.—Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah, as upon Othniel, upon Gideon, and upon Samson (ch. iii. 16; vi. 34; xiii. 25; xiv. 19; xv. 14). He passed over, *i. e.* he went all through, Gilead, and Manasseh,—for the purpose, no doubt, of collecting forces,—and passed over Mizpeh. It should be to Mizpeh. Mizpeh was the capital and mustering place of his army, and his base of operations (ch. x. 17; xi. 11, note). Having organised his forces at Mizpeh of Gilead, he passed over to the children of Ammon, *i. e.* commenced his attack upon the invaders, as it is stated in ver. 32, which takes up the thread of the narrative.

Vers. 30, 31.—And Jephthah vowed a vow. This verse and the following go back to relate something which preceded his passing over to the children of Ammon, *viz.*, his rash and unhappy vow. This is related, as so many things in Scripture are, without note or comment, and the reader must pass his own sentence upon the deed. That sentence can only be one of unreserved condemnation on the part of any one acquainted with the spirit and letter of the word of God. Many attempts have been made to show that Jephthah only contemplated the offering of an animal in sacrifice; but the natural and indeed necessary interpretation of the words shows that he had a human victim in mind. He could not expect any but a human being to come forth from the doors of his house, nor could any but a human being come forth "to meet him"—a common phrase always spoken of men (Gen. xiv. 17; xxiv. 65; Exod. iv. 14; xviii. 7; Numb. xx. 20; 1 Sam. xxv. 34, &c., and below in ver. 34). Obviously, in the greatness of his danger and the extreme hazard of his undertaking (ch. xii. 3), he thought to propitiate God's favour by a terrible and extraordinary vow. But if we ask how Jephthah came to have such erroneous notions of the character of God, the answer is not far to seek. Jephthah

was "the son of a strange woman," probably, as we have seen, a Syrian (ch. xi. 1—11, note), and had passed many years of his life as an exile in Syria. Now it is well known that human sacrifices were frequently practised in Syria, as they were also by the Ammonites, who made their children pass through the fire to Moloch, and it cannot surprise us that a man brought up as Jephthah was, and leading the life of a freebooter at the head of a band of Syrian outlaws, should have the common Syrian notion of the efficacy of human sacrifices in great emergencies. His language, indeed, about Jehovah and Chemosh in ver. 24 savoured of semi-heathenism. Nor is it any valid objection that we are told in ver. 29 that "the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah." The phrase does not mean that thenceforth he was altogether under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, so that all that he did was inspired by the Spirit of truth and wisdom, but that the Spirit of the Lord inspired him with extraordinary strength and power for the great task of leading Israel to battle against the Ammonites. And I will offer. The rendering suggested by some, *or* I will offer, meaning, if the first-comer is a human being he shall be the Lord's, or if it is an animal I will offer it as a burnt offering, is wholly inadmissible.

Ver. 32.—So Jephthah. The narrator takes up again the thread of the narrative, which was interrupted at ver. 29, the words *he passed over unto the children of Ammon* being repeated.

Ver. 33.—From Aroer . . . to Minnith. The Aroer here mentioned seems to be that in the tribe of Gad (Numb. xxxii. 34; Josh. xiii. 25), now *Nahr Amman*. Minnith is thought to have been situated four Roman miles from Heshbon, on the road to Rabbah of the children of Ammon, afterwards called Philadelphia. It was called *Mannith* in the time of Eusebius. The plain of the vine-

yards, better taken as a proper name, *Abel-ceramim*. The site is not certainly known. Eusebius speaks of two *Abels*, both fertile in vineyards, one seven Roman miles from Rabbah, which is probably the one here meant.

Ver. 34.—*To his house*. See ver. 11. *His only child* (*Jehid*)—the same term as is applied to Isaac (Gen. xxii. 2). Eusebius says that Cronus sacrificed his only son, who on that account was called Jeoud, which in the Phœnician tongue means an *only son* ('Prep. Evang.,' iv. 17).

Ver. 35.—*Thou hast brought me very low*—literally, *thou hast thoroughly bowed me down*, i. e. with sorrow. *I cannot go back*. A forcible illustration of the evil of rash vows. He who makes them is so placed that he must sin. If he breaks his vow, he has taken God's name in vain; if he keeps it, he breaks one of God's commandments. So it was with Saul (1 Sam. xiv. 24, 39—45), with Herod (Mark vi. 23); so it has often been since with those who have made unauthorised vows, and who in attempting to keep them have fallen into deadly sin.

Ver. 36.—*My father, &c.* See Numb. xxxii. 2. The touching submission of Jephthah's daughter to her unnatural and terrible fate, while it reveals a most lovable character, seems also to show that the idea of a human sacrifice was not so strange to her mind as it is to ours. The sacrifice of his eldest son as a burnt offering by the king of Moab, some 300 years later, as related 2 Kings iii. 27; the intended sacrifices of Iphigenia and of Phrixus in Greek mythology; the sacrifices of children to Moloch, so often spoken of in Scripture; the question in Micah vi. 7, "Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" the Phœnician

custom mentioned by Sanchoniatho (quoted by Porphyry), of sacrificing to Saturn one of those most dear to them in times of war, pestilence, or drought; the yearly sacrifice at Carthage of a boy chosen by lot ('Sil. Italicus,' 4, 765), and many other examples, prove the prevalence of human sacrifices in early times, and in heathen lands. This must be borne in mind in reading the history of Jephthah.

Ver. 37.—*And bewail my virginity*. It is a striking evidence of the strong desire among Hebrew women to be mothers, as seen in Sarah, Rachel, Hannah, and others, that it was the prospect of dying unmarried which seemed to Jephthah's daughter the saddest part of her fate. So in Ps. lxxviii. 68, *their maidens were not given to marriage* is one of the items of the misery of Israel (see too ver. 39).

Ver. 39.—*Who did with her according to his vow*. Nothing can be more express than this statement. In fact, except the natural horror we feel at a human sacrifice, there is nothing to cast the least shade of doubt upon the fact that Jephthah's daughter was offered up as a burnt offering, in accordance with heathen notions, but, as Josephus says, neither "conformably to the law, nor acceptably to God." Most of the early Jewish commentators and all the Christian Fathers for ten or eleven centuries (Origen, Chrysostom, Theodoret, Jerome, Augustine, &c.) held this view. Luther's comment is, "Some affirm that he did not sacrifice her, but the text is clear enough." *She knew*. Rather, *she had known*.

Ver. 40.—*The daughters of Israel, &c.* No other trace of this custom, which was probably confined to Gilead, remains. *Telament*. The word rather means *to praise*, or *celebrate*, as in ch. v. 11 (*rehearse*).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 29—40.—*Human perverseness embittering the sweet cup*. The tragic history of Jephthah and his daughter is one of the saddest in the Bible. It forms a drama full of pathos, and with terrible contrasts of joy and sorrow. Indeed the whole life of Jephthah was one of startling incident. Driven from his home in youth to become a fugitive and an exile; leading the wild and exciting life of a captain of freebooters till middle age; then recalled to his father's house to take his place as head of the State with all the pomp and power of a great prince, a great warrior, a conqueror, and a judge; in the height of his joy and triumph struck to the ground by a sorrow of the intensest bitterness, which must have blighted the few remaining years of his life—his whole life was one of strange vicissitudes and sensational events. The stain of his birth was not, of course, any fault of his; but it led to that irregular course of lawlessness and violence which must have laid the seeds of many faults of character—recklessness, impulsiveness, and indifference to human rights and human sufferings—which were mingled with many great and heroic qualities. Especially we see how the habit of fighting for plunder, and for the purely selfish ends of a livelihood for himself and his followers, produced that lower type of greatness which bartered his own energies and prowess for place and power, instead of the generous

self-sacrifice for the good of his country which marked the career of Ehud and Gideon. What, however, is here especially to be remarked and treasured up in our minds is, that the cup of prosperity and joy which God's goodness had mixed for Jephthah was turned into a cup of bitterness by his own perverse folly and rashness and ignorance of God's grace. See what great things God had done for him. He had delivered him from his life of lawlessness; he had placed him in a high and honourable estate; he had brought him from banishment to the land and house of his fathers; he had filled him with his Spirit, and mightily strengthened him for his great task; he had gone forth with his army, and driven his enemies before his face, and crowned him with victory. Jephthah returned to his home as the deliverer of his country, the restorer of peace to the homesteads of Gilead, all glittering with success and glory. Nor was he wanting in sources of a softer and tenderer happiness. A bright and loving spirit, full of affection and joyous sympathy, overflowing with dutiful pride and beaming sympathy, was awaiting his return. His daughter, the light of his home, the solace of his cares, was there to welcome him and to double his happiness by sharing it. And as he looked forward to the future, he might hope to see her the mother of children who would perpetuate his name and his race. Such was his lot as God had prepared it for him. His own rash and perverse act, springing from a culpable ignorance of the character of God, and directed by heathen superstition and cruelty instead of by trust in the love and mercy of Jehovah, poured an ingredient of extreme bitterness into this cup of joy and poisoned his whole life. The hour of triumph was turned into desolation, the bright home was made a house of mourning, what should have been years of peace and honour were turned into years of trouble and despair, and Jephthah had no one but himself to blame for this lamentable reverse. Alas, how often we can match this scene by similar instances of human perverseness embittering the sweet cup of life! A nation's career is checked by crime, or cruelty, or treachery; an individual's life is marred by some act of ungodliness which entails a life-long harvest of bitter fruits; domestic enjoyment is destroyed by the sins of selfishness and self-willed folly. Bountiful gifts of a gracious Providence, wealth and abundance, splendid opportunities for good, intellectual endowments, rare talents, or, in humbler life, openings for advancement and usefulness which might have led to distinction, are through the perverse folly of their possessors worse than wasted, and dark shadows are thrown across what should have been the brightness of a happy life. And then men speak of their bad luck, and murmur against the providence of God; as if one could sow the wind and not reap the whirlwind, or cut off the shadow of sin, remorse and shame and death.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 29—33.—*The spirit of sacred warfare.* There is much at which the modern reader stumbles in the stories of Old Testament warfare. The pitilessness, the assumption that all the right of the question between the belligerents is on one side, the carnage even to extermination, are all repugnant to modern feeling. It is well to look at the Divine background and relation of these wars: therein, and therein alone, will be found their apology, if apology be forthcoming. In the Ammonite war of Jephthah—

I. JUSTIFICATION IS FOUND IN THAT, ON THE LOWEST GROUND, IT WAS A WAR OF SELF-PRESERVATION; AND, ON THE HIGHEST, ISRAEL WAS DEFINITELY AND AUTHORITATIVELY IDENTIFIED WITH THE CAUSE OF GOD'S TRUTH AND RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND APPOINTED THE INSTRUMENT OF HIS JUDGMENTS. In a sense there was "no quarter" in these wars. The claims of the foes of God's people were of the most extreme and exacting character. The barbarians had no pity. It would have been of small moment to them to have "utterly cut off" every man, woman, and child. The greatest crimes were perpetrated by them on the smallest provocation; and they could not be trusted. There was one argument, and one alone, that could be understood—the sword. But there were also weighty interests represented by Israel, for the sake of which it was pre-eminently important that it should continue to exist, and that under conditions of freedom and religion. It was its mission to reveal the will of God to

men, not only as a verbal communication, but as a law illustrated in life and conduct. These interests were the highest interests of the world, and Israel was custodian of them for all future ages. There is a humanitarianism that discounts truth, and would reduce all duty to the nearer and more external utilities of life. The Bible, whilst not ignoring the brotherhood of men (no book guards this so jealously), is careful to ground it upon a Divine fatherhood, and to secure its true observance by enforcement of morality and righteousness. Israel, too, was not at liberty to exercise forbearance. "The iniquity" of these nations "was full." They were guilty of unnameable crimes, rejecters of Divine revelation, and cumberers of the ground yet to be occupied by God's gracious purposes.

II. ALL THROUGH JEHOVAH WAS RECOGNISED AS THE TRUE ARBITER. Nothing could be more impressive than the attitude of Jephthah. He is anxious to obtain a just settlement without recourse to arms. He sets forth his statement of the case with the utmost courtesy, exactitude, and forbearance. Every opportunity is given for peaceful understanding; but Ammon turns a deaf ear. Solemnly then, under the peculiar dispensation in which they lived, they put the question in the hands of God. Jehovah is to witness between the disputants, and the war is no longer a confused strife, but a punitive judgment. Israel, under such circumstances, was not at liberty to waive its moral claims, and to grant a truce ere the enemy had yielded the point at issue. Israel is the instrument of Divine vengeance upon a wicked and obstinate nation. It is an anachronism of the gravest consequence to judge of the wars of the ancient world by the ameliorated conditions of modern life.

III. THE LEADER OF ISRAEL RECEIVED HIS COMMISSION DIRECTLY FROM THE HANDS OF GOD. Nothing else can be meant by "then the Spirit of Jehovah came upon Jephthah." Divine impulse, Divine wisdom, Divine obligation are all implied. It is no longer a war whose main issues and movements are subject to fallible human conditions; it is really in God's hands. He bears the blame, so far as his commands are observed. If the mode of warfare, &c. appear inhuman, it will be because our minds fail to grasp the tremendous importance of that righteousness of which they were the slow precursors and rude witnesses.

IV. THE WAR IS CARRIED ON IN THE SPIRIT OF SELF-SACRIFICE AND IMPLICIT DEVOTION. The vow of Jephthah shows this. He anticipates his return in victory, and the people's enthusiastic welcome to him as their deliverer. Like Gideon, he will not accept this; it is Jehovah's alone. To Jehovah, therefore, he vows of his own "whatsoever cometh forth (out) of the doors of my house to meet me." No gratification of self, therefore, could be the motive of such a campaign. If, on the other hand, there is not that repugnance to bloodshed displayed by Jephthah that might be looked for in a Christian leader, we must remember that the religious nature developed slowly in human history, and God chose his instruments not because they were perfect, but, such as they were, to bring on higher possibilities and a better time.—M.

Vers. 30, 31, 34—40.—*Jephthah's vow.* What it involved has been much disputed. But the wording of the vow certainly admits of an interpretation consistent with the highest humanity. The object is expressed neutrally, as being more comprehensive; but there is a distinction introduced into the consequent member of the sentence which shows that regard is had to a dual possibility, viz., of the object being either personal or otherwise. If the former, he or she was to be "Jehovah's," an expression unnecessary if it was to be made a burnt offering, and which could only mean "dedicated to perpetual virginity or priesthood." If the latter, he would "offer it for a burnt offering." It bears out this that his daughter asks for two months "to bewail her virginity." The inference is imperative. It was not death, but perpetual virginity, to which she was devoted. In this vow we observe—

I. THE SPIRIT OF CONSECRATION IT EVINCED. Its meaning was evident. Jehovah was the true Judge and Deliverer of Israel. His, therefore, should be the glory when Israel returned in victory. There was to be no diverting of honour from him to Jephthah. A sacrifice, therefore, should be made before all men to acknowledge this. But as Jephthah is the person most in danger of being tempted to forget God's claim, he himself gives anticipatively of his own, and of his own, especially, which might

be considered as specially for his honour. It was a "blank form" to be filled up by Providence as it would.

II. THE UNEXPECTED FORM THE SACRIFICE ASSUMED. How it astonishes men when God takes them at their word! Not that they do not mean what they say, but they do not realise all it implies. God ever does this that he may educate the heart in loving sacrifice, and reveal the grandeur and absoluteness of his own claim upon us.

III. THE GRACE THAT INVESTED IT FROM—1. *The mutual love of parent and child.* They both sorrow because she is an only child, and they are all in all to one another. It was a keen, real sacrifice. 2. *The unquestioning and cheerful obedience of the child.* Like Isaac and Christ. 3. *The unwavering fidelity of Jephthah to his vow.* It was the wisest course, and the one that proved best the fidelity and infinite love of God. There was sorrow, but who will say that there was not a compensating blessedness in the act, and a "more exceeding weight of glory" in the ages to come? This is what God expects. Have we ever vowed to him? If so, have we paid our vows? Negligence in this matter will explain much that distresses and perplexes us. Honesty towards God—how few practise it! Yet this is the true proof of him (Mal. iii. 10).

IV. HOW AN ABSOLUTE PERSONAL SACRIFICE MAY BECOME A NATIONAL IDEAL AND ATONEMENT. The circumstances were such that all Israel sympathised with the act of self-devotion. It fell in with the national mood and carried it to heroic pitch. The "custom in Israel" shows how profoundly the spirit of the people had been touched. The maiden offered to Jehovah is adopted as the offering of her people, a vicarious sacrifice of their repentance and faith. So does the Lord Jesus, the Son of God, become the world's atonement (2 Cor. v. 14, 15).—M.

Ver. 29.—*The Spirit of the Lord.* I. THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS NOT A MERE INFLUENCE, BUT A LIVING PRESENCE. It is taught throughout Scripture that God does not only bestow graces, but also comes personally into our souls (John xiv. 16, 17). This Divine presence may not be perceived by the senses, as in the visions of the dove (Matt. iii. 16) and of the cloven tongues of fire (Acts ii. 3). It need not give rise to any ecstasy or visible excitement, as in the case of the Corinthian Church (1 Cor. xiv. 2). It may be without the immediate consciousness of the subject. But it will be proved by its effects.

II. THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD COMES UPON A MAN TO INSPIRE HIM FOR SERVICE. God does not simply inhabit a man as a temple; he infuses his life into the very being of the man; transforms, elevates, enlightens, strengthens. Thus Jephthah found the Spirit to be the source of his power for battle. God's Spirit is always the spring of the Christian's highest energies. It is foolish to attempt to do any good work without the aid that is given by the indwelling power of God.

III. THE SPECIAL FORM OF THE INFLUENCE OF THE SPIRIT OF GOD WILL BE DETERMINED BY THE CAPACITIES OF THE RECIPIENT AND THE REQUIREMENTS OF HIS WORK. There is a variety of gifts. 1. God's Spirit affects us differently, according to our *natural differences*. To the thoughtful man he is a spirit of understanding. To him who hungers and thirsts after righteousness he is a spirit of holiness. To the sympathiser, the comforting friend, he is a spirit of love. To the active worker he is a spirit of power. 2. God's Spirit also affects us differently according to the *needs of the times*. God does not waste his influence; he adapts it to requirements. Therefore we must not think that his Spirit is less with us than with men of old because the manifestation is different, nor that he is less with those who have not the form of spiritual influence which we esteem most than with those who possess it (1 Cor. xii. 6).

IV. THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD DOES NOT ANNIHILATE THE INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERS OF MEN. Jephthah retains his natural characteristics, and still shows them. 1. God's Spirit does not supersede natural talent, but enlightens, purifies, and strengthens. 2. God's Spirit does not destroy human weakness. Jephthah has the Spirit of the Lord, yet he may be rash and may err. The spirit of wisdom does not necessarily accompany the spirit of strength. We may have the presence of the Spirit, and yet not be filled with the Spirit, so that human weakness may linger by the side of Divine power.—A.

JUDGES.

K

Vers. 30—40.—*Jephthah's vow.* Jephthah's conduct should be viewed in the light of his age and of his own conscientious convictions, and not judged by the clearer light and changed convictions of Christendom. Measured by modern standards, it may appear superstitious, cruel, insane; but measured by the only standards to which Jephthah could bring it, his conduct was noble beyond expression. From the incident generally we may gather the following lessons:—

I. THE HAND OF GOD SHOULD BE RECOGNISED IN OUR GOOD AND FRUITFUL WORKS. The elders had called upon Jephthah to deliver them from the Ammonites. Yet the warrior saw that his own right hand could not secure the victory; if this came, it must be from God. Such conduct shows *humility*—a difficult grace for a popular hero to practise in the midst of his triumph; and *faith* in discerning the secret of success in the presence of God, and trusting to this before entering the battle.

II. IT IS RIGHT THAT WE SHOULD RECOGNISE GOD'S CLAIMS IN RETURN FOR THE RECEPTION OF HIS GRACE. The thank offering belongs not to the Levitical law alone, but to all religion (Rom. xii. 1). It is foolish to think to buy the help of God by promising him devotion in return (Gen. xxviii. 20—22). But it may be helpful to our fulfilment of the duties of gratitude if we recognise the obligation of thankfulness even before we receive the special blessing of God, as we are more likely to realise it fully then than after we are relieved and satisfied. It should always be remembered that we have already received such great bounties from God that we are under constant obligations to him, that he claims our hearts, our possessions, our all, and that our true blessedness is only found in perfect surrender to him.

III. IT IS GENERALLY FOOLISH AND WRONG TO MAKE A VOW THE CONSEQUENCES OF WHICH WE DO NOT FORESEE. There may be an occasional advantage in the vow to bind the soul by a solemn recognition of its obligations; but we are equally required to give God our all whether we make a vow or no. Nothing is more weak than to vow at a time when we are not called to make a sacrifice, and then to prove unequal to the sacrifice when this is required. It is better to count the cost and refrain from making the vow if necessary (Luke xiv. 28). The vow is often only a sign of presumption. It would be well for us to turn our vows into prayers, and instead of promising that we will do some great thing, to ask God to give us grace to do it. Still, viewed from the standpoint of devotion, there is something noble in the perfect surrendering of self, and the brave trustfulness of Jephthah's vow.

IV. WE SHOULD CONSIDER OURSELVES BOUND TO KEEP THOSE VOWS WHICH WE MAKE TO OUR OWN HURT SO LONG AS WE DO NOT FEEL THIS TO BE WRONG. Our own inconvenience is no excuse for declining to fulfil an obligation, just because we did not anticipate the trouble in entering into the obligation (Ps. xv. 4). But our conviction of wrong is a reason for not keeping our promise. A promise to do evil is void from the first. It is wrong to make such a promise; to fulfil it is to add a second wrong. We can never bind ourselves by vow to do that which it would not be right for us to do without the vow. Therefore for us, with our Christian light, it would be sinful to fulfil such a vow as Jephthah's. Nevertheless, the great Hebrew hero clearly felt that it was his duty to fulfil it, and therefore to him the vow was binding. If we blame him, it must be (1) for the rashness which allowed him to contract himself into an obligation which he would never have entered with his eyes opened, and (2) for the ignorance of the character of God which is shown in his supposition that God could be pleased with the sacrifice of his daughter. Even the imperfect revelation of God then vouchsafed should have prevented such a frightful misconception if it had been rightly used (Gen. xxii. 12). But we may find more of good example than of warning in the whole incident. Pathetic as is the error of Jephthah, his magnificent fidelity is a model of religious heroism.—A.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XII.

Ver. 1. — *Northward*, or, otherwise rendered, to *Zaphon*, a city of the Gadites mentioned in Josh. xiii. 27 together with Succoth,

and thought to be the modern *Amaleh* on the Wady Rajib (see Vanderveld's map). It is difficult to say with certainty which rendering is right, but on the whole the latter seems most probable. Although Gilead does

lie north-east of Ephraim, it hardly seems a natural description of the Ephraimite movement to say they "went northwards;" whereas if they marched to Zaphon the phrase would be precise. The previous phrase, *gathered themselves together*, means *mustered for battle*, as in ch. vii. 23, 24. *We will burn thine house, &c.*—the same savage threat as the Philistine youths made use of to induce Samson's wife to discover and reveal his riddle (ch. xiv. 15), and as the Philistines actually put in practice upon her and her father in revenge for the destruction of their corn (ch. xv. 6). *Passedst thou over*, as in ch. xi. 29, 32; xii. 8.

Ver. 2.—*When I called you*. This incident is not mentioned in the previous narrative. Probably Jephthah asked the help of Ephraim when he was first made chief of the Gileadites, and they refused partly because they thought the attempt desperate, and partly because they were offended at Jephthah's leadership.

Vers. 4, 5.—The English version of these somewhat obscure verses is obviously wrong, and devoid of sense. The obscurity arises partly from verses 5 and 6 being merely an amplification, i. e. a narrative in detail of what is more briefly related in ver. 4; and from the insertion of the explanatory words, "*Gilead lies in the midst of Ephraim and in the midst of Manasseh*," in ver. 4. The literal translation of the two verses is as follows:—*And the men of Gilead smote Ephraim (at the fords of Jordan), for, said they, ye are fugitives of Ephraim. (Gilead lies in the midst of Ephraim and in the midst of Manasseh, i. e. between Manasseh and Ephraim, so that in coming from Manasseh, where they had taken refuge, to return to Ephraim they were obliged to pass through Gilead, and the Gileadites had taken the passages of Jordan before the Ephraimites; and it was so, that when the fugitives of Ephraim said, Let me pass over, that the men of Gilead said, Art thou an Ephraimite? If he said, Nay, then said they unto him, Say now Shibboleth, &c., i. e. they put him to the test of pronunciation; and if they found by his pronunciation of the word Shibboleth, viz., Sibboleth, that he was an Ephraimite, in spite of his denial, then they took him and slew him (killed him in cold blood) at the passages of Jordan.) And there fell at that time, &c.* The direct narrative goes on here from ver. 4.

Omitting the long explanatory parenthesis from the latter part of ver. 4 to the latter part of ver. 6, the narrative runs (ver. 4), *And the men of Gilead smote Ephraim, for, said they, ye are fugitives of Ephraim; and there fell at that time of the Ephraimites forty and two thousand*. The parenthesis explains why the Ephraimites had to pass through Gilead, and how the Gileadites ascertained in each case whether a man was an Ephraimite or not.

Ver. 6.—*Say now Shibboleth, &c.* We have thus, as it were, accidentally preserved to us a curious dialectical difference between the Ephraimites and the inhabitants of Gilead. A similar difference exists at the present day between the pronunciation of the inhabitants of different parts of Germany. What the Hanoverians call *stein*, a stone, the other Germans call *shtein*. *Shibboleth* means both *an ear of corn and a stream*. *Forty and two thousand*. It is possible that the war between Jephthah and the Ephraimites may have lasted a considerable time, though only the single incident of the slaughter at the fords of Jordan is mentioned, so that the large number of 42,000 men may be less improbable than it seems at first sight. There is, however, always some doubt as to the correctness of numbers (see 1 Sam. vi. 19).

Ver. 7.—*Six years*. Perhaps his sorrow for his daughter shortened his life. *Then died Jephthah the Gileadite*. Better, *And Jephthah the Gileadite died*. In one of the cities. His exact burial-place was perhaps unknown, and therefore the general phrase *in the cities of Judah* was used, as in Gen. xiii. 12. Lot is said to have dwelt *in the cities of the plain*, and in Neh. vi. 2 Sanballat asked Nehemiah to meet him *in the villages of the plain*. Still the phrase is not what you would expect here, and it seems unlikely that Jephthah's burial-place should be unknown. The Septuagint, Vulgate, Syriac, and Arabic versions read, "in his city Gilead," as if Gilead had been the name of Jephthah's paternal city. Another conjecture is that there might have been an *Ar of Gilead* as well as the well-known *Ar of Moab*, or there might have been a collection of towns called *Arey-Gilead* (the towns of Gilead), after the analogy of *Havoth-jair* (ch. x. 4), but there is no evidence in support of these conjectures.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—7.—*The envy of the small great at the great deeds of the small*. The detection of faults of character is useful to those who wish to correct and perfect their own, and for this reason the observation of the tendency of particular positions to produce particular faults is very valuable. The particular vice of the human mind which the shameful and unpatriotic arrogance of the Ephraimites towards the deliverer of their country brings to light, is the tendency on the part of those in high places to

resent and envy the great deeds and successes of those whom they look upon as very inferior to themselves. Ephraim was the largest and most powerful of the tribes of Israel. The great leader, Joshua, was of that tribe, and they seem to have thought that they had an hereditary primacy among the tribes. We have already seen this spirit breaking out fiercely in their strife with Gideon (ch. viii. 1—3), and now again in their hostile attack upon Jephthah. Nay, even in Joshua's time something of the same arrogance drew down upon them the rebuke of their great captain (Josh. xvii. 14—16). They seem to have thought that, being the chief tribe, they were entitled to be considered first in everything; that their advice was always to be sought, their wishes always to be consulted; and that the maintenance of their dignity ought to be the first consideration of all the other tribes. And yet we do not find them maintaining their claims by pre-eminent zeal for the public service, by a spirit of self-sacrifice for the public good, nor by furnishing the most eminent men to take the lead in civil or military affairs. They were not the first to risk life and limb against the Midianite hosts; they were not the first to repel the invasion of the children of Ammon. Their own dignity, and not their country's good, was their chief concern. Hence, when an unknown Gideon, of one of the inferior houses of Manasseh, or a half-caste Jephthah on the other side Jordan, rose to the first rank as saviours of their country, the envy of Ephraim burst out into a flame. What business had such as they to do great things? It was an invasion of the prerogative of the "great people." It was presumption; it was a slight put upon Ephraim. No punishment was too bad for such insolence. "We will burn thine house upon thee with fire." This history then illustrates the pride of caste. It shows us men, having a great opinion of themselves, not influenced by that good opinion to do as much as possible for others, but only to exact as much as possible for themselves. It shows us how an overweening estimate of themselves induces men to envy others, whom they think inferior, if they distinguish themselves, and rise superior to them in public estimation. It was very much the same spirit which showed itself in the Pharisees when our Lord's fame as a teacher drew such multitudes to hear him. They thought they had the monopoly of teaching, that no doctrine which did not emanate from their schools ought to be listened to, that knowledge could proceed from no mouth but that of a Rabbi. And so when the carpenter's Son opened his mouth and poured forth his lessons of exquisite wisdom and power, and enchaind the attention of the multitudes, and was acknowledged as a prophet, their envy was excited. Instead of rejoicing that God had sent them a teacher mighty in word and deed, they only plotted how they might silence the eloquent tongue. Instead of sitting at his feet and learning at his mouth the true will of God and the way of life, they were only roused to hatred, and persuaded the multitude to say, Let him be crucified. The same spirit is common in our own days in every profession. The small great envy the great deeds of the small. But God's gifts are not confined to any caste or class; and they only are truly great who rejoice in great qualities wherever they are found, and view without envy the career of those who outstrip them in the race of doing good and advancing the glory of God.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—3.—*Ingratitude the frequent reward of benefactors.* The triumph of Jephthah is marred by another incident. Ephraim, the most powerful tribe west of the Jordan, confronts him in hostile array. His experience must have been bitter and hard to comprehend. But he is not alone in the results which his good deeds brought upon him. Benefactors in every age have met with a like reception.

I. **THEIR GOOD DEEDS ARE THEMSELVES AN OFFENCE.** This has its root and ground in the incapacity of the natural mind to perceive and appreciate spiritual motives; but it seldom takes the form of direct, simple objection to the good deed. Other forms of excuse for opposition are easily discovered. 1. *The spirit in which they are wrought is misunderstood or misinterpreted.* The key to our judgments of others is in ourselves. If then we are evil, our judgments will be perverted. All through the history of God's Church this influence is apparent, from the old ill-natured query, "Does Job serve God for nought?" to the culminating wickedness described in the

gospel: "The light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not. . . . He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not" (John i. 5, 10, 11). "To the pure, all things are pure," and *vice versâ*. 2. *They present an unwelcome contrast to the conduct of others.* Every good deed is as a light which brings to view things of like kind, and inspires similar behaviour; but also reveals the hideousness and hatefulness of the ordinary life of man. This is an offence against the *amour propre* of the sinner, and therefore unpardonable; it is also an exposure of hypocrisy, and sadly inconvenient. It makes the heart of good men ache to see this, and to cry, "When will goodness not be the exception, but the rule?" 3. *The honour they acquire for their authors is coveted.* To minds not actuated by the spirit of goodness, the only thing that can be desired in good works is the outward fame and advantage they bring. The exclusion from this is keenly resented. Hundreds are eager to share the crown of the righteous who are far from breathing his spirit or emulating his example.

II. HOW HARD IS IT FOR EVEN GOOD MEN TO UNDERSTAND THIS! Jephthah argues his case, and asks, "Wherefore are ye come up unto me this day, to fight against me?" The law of Moses promised temporal advantages to those who fulfilled it. Occasionally these were not enjoyed, and there was a consequent perplexity. But we are not to suppose that this wonder and mental trouble were confined to that dispensation; they are deeply human characteristics. Our Saviour himself experienced them when he asked, "Many good works have I showed you from my Father; for which of those works do ye stone me?" (John x. 32); and again, "Are ye come out as against a thief with swords and staves for to take me? I sat daily with you teaching in the temple, and ye laid no hold on me" (Matt. xxvi. 55). The key to this mystery is furnished by the beatitude of the persecuted for righteousness' sake (Matt. v. 11, 12), and realised in the spirit of Christ's sacrifice.—M.

Ver. 4.—*The reproach of the righteous.* "Ye Gileadites are fugitives of Ephraim among the Ephraimites, and among the Manassites."

I. THOSE WHO ARE OPPOSED TO TRUTH AND GOODNESS OFTEN OBJECT TO THE CIRCUMSTANCES IN LIFE AND THE CHARACTER OF THOSE WHO ARE REPUTED TO DO GREAT WORKS IN GOD'S SERVICE. "Fugitives" is a term of social reproach. It suggests vile reasons which made it convenient for them to leave their own home. So it was said, "Is not this Joseph, the carpenter's son?" and, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" So John ix. 24, 29.

II. THIS OBJECTION IS INCONSEQUENT. It ignores the real authorship of goodness, and the method of his working, and character of his instrumentalities in all time. It is *self-contradictory* (John ix. 31).—M.

Vers. 5, 6.—*Shibboleth*:—*The importance of little defects, faults, &c.* This not absolute, but relative.

I. WHEREIN THIS IMPORTANCE CONSISTS. 1. *In what they suggest or reveal.* A slip in accident, or a blunder in the statement of matter of fact, may discredit the pretended scholar. A difference in tone or manner may mean indifference or enmity or hypocrisy. Temporary neglect of a child may prove want of real parental affection. Neglect of private or public prayer may be little in itself, but it may spring from the alienation of the soul from God. The glib utterance of a "white lie" may make us doubt the whole moral character of the speaker. Grave diseases often declare themselves by comparatively slight symptoms, as leprosy, paralytic *ataxia*, &c. 2. *We see it in the order of life as a whole.* In the vegetable and animal world the law of the "survival of the fittest" often works through comparatively slight organic adaptations. In human life the advantage and ultimate success of men often depends upon their slight superiority to other competitors. A little ignorance, extravagance, carelessness, &c. may work ruin. "A stitch in time saves nine." "Ready, aye ready," is a noble motto. Great discoveries have been made by men who were just a little in advance of their fellows. 3. *A critical occasion may give a trifle an unlooked-for importance.* The cackling of geese saved Rome, according to the myth. Peter's uncouth accent occasioned the observation of the maid,

and his emphatic denial of Christ. Vessels have been wrecked because of a little carelessness in taking observations when mists have suddenly arisen, or rocks were in the course. Souls have been lost through impressions produced by the inconsistencies of professing Christians.

II. OUR DUTY WITH RESPECT TO THEM. "Of course it is to correct them, to get rid of them," you say. Yes; but how? Sometimes they are so related to us that we cannot remove them. It is necessary then that we should do all in our power to compensate for them by cultivating other qualities, &c., or to neutralise their influence by timely explanations and clear proofs of our real intention, spirit, character, &c. Mere punctilio, or the scrupulosity of the martinet will not do. We must beware of the folly of those who "strain at a gnat and swallow a camel." Let the whole life be emphatic in contradiction, and let the spirit of Christ so shine through us that men will learn to know us in spite of those failings and defects which give us the lie. "Not far from the kingdom of heaven" may be worse than entire alienation from it.

Tests: their good and evil. As a means of discovering the Ephraimite, the device was highly natural and ingenious. In the main and roughly it was successful. Some such method was evidently required. There was no time to enter into minute detail or examination. But, on the other hand, it was quite possible that some who were not Ephraimites were slain by mistake. So in determining fitness for Church membership, office, or spiritual responsibility—

I. TESTS MAY BE NECESSARY. There are times when it is of the utmost importance for us to know who are God's people and who are not. We are to "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them." From the unholy, disorderly, unbelieving we are commanded to withdraw ourselves. But this injunction were impossible of fulfilment were the distinction between saints and sinners not capable of being made. Christ has happily supplied a test—"By their fruits ye shall know them." The confession of the lips is another element, but it must not be dissociated from the former. So in the life of every day we require to know men, and accordingly have to form our opinions and judgments of them. This is so vital and necessary to safety and happiness, that we do it almost automatically, unconsciously. The honest and the dishonest, the true and the false, the friend and the enemy, we learn to distinguish by actions and words, and the course of their conduct. It is foolish, therefore, for persons to object to tests—they are necessary throughout the whole range of life, temporal and spiritual. But—

II. THEY MAY MISLEAD. In the nature of things they must be superficial, local, accidental, &c. They are observed and interpreted by fallible men. Trifling differences may acquire factitious importance. A man is not to be condemned for a word; a careful study should be made of the whole conduct and character of the man. The Christian life has many "notes," and where one is not forthcoming another may be present. The Epistles have, therefore, a variety of points upon which Christians may test themselves and others. God alone knoweth the heart, and in Christ he will judge the world by infallible judgment. It is better to err on the side of leniency to offenders than on that of severity. It matters not how we may commend ourselves to men, our condition in the sight of God is of chief account.—M.

.. Vers. 1—6.—"*Vaulting ambition, which 'o'erleaps itself.*" This was not the first time of such offence on the part of Ephraim. Gideon had to bear with their unreasonableness, and was gracious enough to permit their co-operation in securing the results of his victory. But now the "cup of their iniquity is full." Not for Ammon's destruction alone is Jephthah raised up; he has a punishment to mete out to Ephraim. They knew it not, but this pride of theirs was on the verge of its fall. They presumed on former exemption from evil consequences, and blindly rushed upon their chastisement. We see here—

I. PRIDE IN ITS DEVELOPMENT AND CAREER. Past kindness and consideration only hardened and strengthened it. Past achievements and the prestige acquired through them are relied upon instead of present obedience to God, &c. Ephraim cared more for its own position and advantage than to serve the commonwealth. By its inaction

in the past and its hostile attitude to Jephthah on the present occasion it plays the traitor. It despised its brethren, and refused to recognise the leader God had chosen, and now it threatened to overthrow the advantage acquired by the Ammonite victory. It became a public nuisance and a political danger.

II. PRIDE IN ITS DIVINE CHASTISEMENT. In the various details of its punishment it is hard to repress a certain measure of sympathy for it. There is something always in the humiliation of a proud nature that commands our sympathy. And yet it was necessary and right that Ephraim should be taught a terrible lesson. 1. *That very tribe, membership with which had been their boast, they would now fain deny.* 2. *The taunt of being "fugitives," which they had used against the Gileadites, is now turned against themselves.* 3. *The martial strength upon which they had relied is now effectually and suddenly reduced.* So will it be with all who set themselves against Christ and his kingdom. "Upon whomsoever this stone shall fall, it will grind him to powder." If God is against us, or, what is the same thing, we are against God, we may expect patient forbearance, and at first gentle chidings; but, if we persist, a terrible retribution. Sin is pride; it refuses to bow to God's will, or to accept the methods of his salvation.—M.

Ver. 1.—*Jealousy.* The men of Ephraim are angry with Jephthah because he has repulsed the Ammonites without their aid.

I. GREAT MEN ARE COMMONLY ASSAILED BY THE JEALOUSY OF THEIR RIVALS. 1. This is no proof of any *falling* on the part of those who are thus attacked. While some of the noblest of men have brought trouble upon their own heads through want of consideration for the petty weaknesses of their inferiors, the best and most conciliatory of men have not been able to avoid the envy and misjudgment of meaner natures. It is impossible to please all classes in doing a work of any magnitude and value. They are not always the worthiest men who have the fewest enemies. Christ had more foes than friends. 2. This is no proof of the *claims* of the rivals of great men. People who cannot improve a work can criticise it.

II. THEY WHO ARE BACKWARD IN ENCOUNTERING THE DANGER OF BATTLE ARE EAGER IN COVETING THE HONOUR OF VICTORY. There is no reason to believe that the men of Ephraim showed any willingness to join with Jephthah till after his great success. Weak and selfish people who will not enter into any enterprise until they see it has succeeded are plentiful enough, but they are worthless. The true men are they who will advocate the right cause when it is at a low ebb, when it is unpopular, when it seems doomed to failure, when the service of it involves risk and loss.

III. THE TASK FROM WHICH MEN SHRINK BEFOREHAND LOOKS EASY AFTER IT HAS BEEN SUCCESSFULLY PERFORMED. Now that Jephthah has defeated the Ammonites, the men of Ephraim think his work was only a safe road to honour in which they would gladly have accompanied him. When we see the master of some art working with deft skill and unerring accuracy, nothing looks more easy than to do as he does. His very triumph destroys the appearance of the difficulties which lie in its way. Thus the honours of the artist and the orator, and, in religious matters, of the martyr and the missionary, inspire jealousy in men who think they are cheaply won just on account of that very excellency which conceals the necessary sacrifice, suffering, or toil by the perfect conquest of it.

IV. SELFISH PEOPLE ARE MORE CONCERNED ABOUT THEIR OWN SHARE IN THE HONOUR OF A GREAT ENTERPRISE THAN ABOUT THE SUCCESS OF IT. The men of Ephraim do nothing to encourage Jephthah; they are only anxious to share his honour. We see in public life personal ambition overcoming public spirit, in Christian work the honour of the agent exalted above the success of the work. But the patriot should be supremely anxious for the welfare of his country, no matter by whom this is secured, and the Christian should be simply desirous of the triumph of Christ and the extension of Christianity, though he may not share the honours of victory. The jealousy which would hinder the good work of others because we have no share in it is treason to Christ. It is unworthy for the Christian to covet or to hold a post which he knows another will occupy better than himself.—A.

Ver. 6.—*Shibboleth*. I. IF A MAN'S PROFESSION IS FALSE TO HIS CHARACTER, THIS WILL BE MADE MANIFEST BY THE HABITS OF HIS LIFE. The Ephraimite who denied his tribal relation was betrayed by his dialectic pronunciation. Thus Peter was convicted of falsehood (Matt. xxvi. 73). It matters little what we say if our conduct belies our words. No man can ultimately conceal his character; it will come out in his countenance, it will colour his speech, it will shape his action. If a man would completely suppress his character, he must destroy it, because while it exists it must obey its nature, which is to be the source of all conduct. You cannot quench a volcano by building over its crater, nor stay the flow of a stream by walling it in. Our true nature, whether it be good or bad, must reveal itself (1) in great critical epochs, when it can endure no restraint; or (2) in casual accidents, when we are off our guard and do not consider the occasion sufficiently important to demand much concern; or (3) in the general course and colour of our life (Matt. vii. 16).

II. SMALL SUPERFICIAL SIGNS MAY INDICATE GREAT FUNDAMENTAL DISTINCTIONS. The test of the "*Shibboleth*" has been much misunderstood, as though it were an instance of the importance which is sometimes unduly given to mere trivial distinctions. The test was simply a means of discovering the tribal relations of men. The Gileadites cared nothing for the difference of pronunciation in itself. They simply used it as a means for determining a really important point—the truth or falsehood of the profession of those who said they were not men of Ephraim. The same mistake was involved in Gibbon's famous sneer about the great division of Christendom on the question of a diphthong. It was not a diphthong, but the fundamental truth of the perfect Divinity of Christ that Athanasius and his friends were contending with the Arians about, and the use of the diphthong was simply a convenient form in which to bring the question to a definite point. So the recent controversies about vestments have been ridiculed as though they were questions of "ecclesiastical millinery," while both parties know quite well that these outside and apparently trivial differences are the signs of fundamental questions concerning priestly authority and sacramental grace. 1. We must beware of judging of the magnitude of a question by the comparative insignificance of its external indications. 2. We must, nevertheless, be careful not to assume that trivial external distinctions are signs of deep and important differences until we have proved the fact. We may erect the test of a "*Shibboleth*" to separate people who have no such fundamental distinctions as those of the men who had been true to Jephthah and the men who had enviously opposed him. The danger is that we should thus magnify the importance of the "*Shibboleth*" itself, and so become narrow and sectarian.—A.

EXPOSITION.

Ver. 8.—*Ibzan of Bethlehem*. It is uncertain whether Bethlehem of Judah is meant, or Bethlehem in the tribe of Zebulun, mentioned in Josh. xix. 15. Josephus says that Ibzan was of the tribe of Judah, and of the city of Bethlehem, and some have supposed a connection between the names of Boaz and Ibzan. But as Bethlehem of the tribe of Judah is generally called Bethlehem of Judah, or Bethlehem-Ephratah, and as Elon and Abdou were judges in North-East Israel, it is perhaps more probable that Bethlehem of Zebulun is meant. Dr. Robinson has identified it with a village—a "very miserable one"—called *Beit Lahm*, six miles west of Nazareth.

Ver. 9.—*He had thirty sons, &c.* From no record of Ibzan's judgeship being preserved, except this domestic incident, we may infer, as in the case of Jair, that no important events took place in his time.

Ver. 10.—*Then died, &c.* Render, *And Ibzan died.*

Ver. 12.—*In Aijalon*. Not Aijalon in the tribe of Dan, mentioned Josh. x. 12; xix. 42, but another city, only spoken of here, whose name is probably preserved in the ruins of *Jaldn*, four hours east of Akka. It is remarkable that the two names *Elon* and *Aijalon* are identical in Hebrew as far as the consonants are concerned. It looks as if Aijalon, which is not mentioned among the Zebulonite cities in Josh. xix. 10—16, was named from Elon, its possessor.

Ver. 13.—*A Pirathonite, i. e. an inhabitant of Pirathon* in the tribe of Ephraim, in the mount of the Amalekites (ver. 15), afterwards famous as the birthplace of Benaiah, one of David's mighty men (2 Sam. xxiii. 30). The *Pharathon* which is mentioned in 1 Macc. ix. 50, and by Josephus, following its authority, as fortified by Jonathan the

brother of Judas may have been the same, though its collocation between Timna and Tekoah rather suggests a more southern position; and the *Ferata* found by Robinson between two and three hours from Samaria, south-south-west, on the way to Jerusalem, seems certainly to represent *Pirathon*.

Ver. 14.—*Nephews*. Rather, *grandsons*. Hebrew, *son's sons*. The number of his family, and their being all mounted on asses, are indications of his wealth and state (see above, ch. viii. 30; x. 4), and perhaps also of peaceful and prosperous times.

Ver. 15.—*The mount of the Amalekites*. This name points to some incident of which the memory is lost, though, with the usual tenacity of names, the name which once recorded it survives. It may have been some ancient settlement of the Amalekites, who were a very wandering, wide-spread race, which gave the name; or it may have been some great defeat and slaughter which they suffered from the Israelites, whose land they invaded (ch. vi. 3, 33), just as the rock Oreb and the wine-press of Zeeb (ch. vii. 25) commemorated the victory over those princes.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 8—15.—*The calm after the storm*. Jephthah's day of life had been a stormy one indeed. The strife with his own brethren; the strife with the children of Ammon; the strife between nature and superstition, and the throbbings of a distracted heart; the strife with the tribe of Ephraim, and the strife with a premature death under which he sunk, marked him as a "man of strife" (Ver. 2 in the Hebrew, and Jer. xv. 10) all his days, both him and "his people." But now there came quiet, uneventful days both for Israel and his rulers. There is no mention of foreign foe or of domestic discord. Scenes of family life take the place of the martial muster and the bloody fight. There is nothing to record save how long the judges judged, when they died, and where they were buried. We infer, indeed, from the fact that there were judges the continual care of God for his people, and from the absence of invasion and servitude we infer that the people did not forsake God. But more than this we do not know, nor over how great a part of Israel these judgeships did extend. But the reflection cannot but arise that it is not good for a people to be in continual strife. Struggles for supremacy over enemies without, and conflict for the settlement of government at home, should have their term, and give way to enjoyment of prosperity and peace. The happiest times in a nation's life are not always those that shine the brightest on the page of history. And so in the life of the individual. Though the surface of his life be not ruffled, nor its tenor varied by any startling changes, there may be a hidden work of God going on in the soul more momentous than the gain or loss of fortunes, or any vicissitudes of sickness and of health. Faith may be waxing stronger, and love may be burning brighter; patience may be perfecting her work, and the spirit of meekness may be steadily gaining ground over the spirit of wrath and intolerance; the knowledge of Jesus Christ may be filling the field of the soul's vision, and the kingdom of heaven may be drawing nearer to the soul's embrace, and yet the outward life may be monotonous and uneventful. Anyhow let us use the calm and untempestuous moments of our life to make undisturbed progress in the great business of our salvation; and in the assurance of God's unwearied love let us pursue our own quiet round of meditation, and prayer, and praise. Great events and mighty deeds figure on the page of history, but the soul's progress in holiness is worthy to be recorded by an angel's pen.

Vers. 8—15.—Cf. on ch. x. 1—5.—M.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XIII.

Ver. 1.—*Did evil again*. It by no means follows from this phrase that this chapter is in direct chronological sequence to the preceding. The scene is shifted to the tribe of Dan, and to the Philistines on the west, and there is nothing to guide us as to the exact

time when the things narrated occurred. But the end of the *forty years* probably coincided with the judgeship of Samuel; for there was no complete deliverance in the time of Samson, only occasional checks to the Philistine domination (see ver. 5). It was not till the days of Samuel that the Philistines were really smitten (see 1 Sam.

vii. 3—14). We may suppose the date of the ensuing narrative to be somewhere in the first decade of the Philistine oppression.

Ver. 2.—*Zorah*. Enumerated among the cities in the tribe of Dan in Josh. xix. 41, but ascribed to Judah, *ibid.* xv. 33 (there transliterated *Zoreah*) and in 2 Chron. xi. 10. Probably the boundary passed through the city, as that of Judah and Benjamin did through Jerusalem. In Neh. xi. 29 it is transliterated *Zareah*, and also ascribed to Judah. It is almost always coupled with Eshtaol, as in ver. 25 of this chapter. It was situated in the Shephelah, or plain country, and was fortified by Rehoboam (2 Chron. xi. 10). It is supposed to be represented by the modern *Surah*, at the entrance of the Wady Ghurab. The family of the Danites. It appears from Numb. xxvi. 42, 43 that there was only one family in the tribe of Dan, so that in this case tribe and family were co-extensive.

Ver. 3.—*Thou shalt . . . bear a son*. It is obvious to compare the promise to Abraham and Sarah (Gen. xvii. 19; xviii. 10, 14), to Hannah (1 Sam. i. 17), to Elizabeth (Luke i. 13), and to the blessed Virgin (Luke i. 31).

Ver. 5.—*The child shall be a Nazarite*, &c. So it was said, though not in the same words, concerning Samuel (1 Sam. i. 11) and concerning John the Baptist (Luke i. 15). A Nazarite (or, more correctly, a *Nazirite*) means *one separated*, and specially dedicated to God. The law of the Nazarites is contained in Numb. vi., where, however, only *Nazarites of days*, i. e. Nazarites for a definite time, are spoken of. Samson, Samuel, and John the Baptist were *perpetual Nazarites*, Nazarites of *for ever*, as the Mishna classifies them. Abstinence from strong drink, and from anything made of the grape; letting the locks of the head grow unchecked by the razor; and keeping quite clear of any pollution from a dead body, even in case of the death of his nearest relations, were the chief articles of a Nazarite's vow. St. Paul took the vow of a Nazarite of days, and offered the prescribed sacrifices, together with "the hair of the head of his separation," as we read in Acts xviii. 18; xxi. 23—26. *He shall begin*, &c. This is an exact description of what Samson did. He did not "deliver Israel" as the other judges did; but he began to shake the Philistine power, and prepared the way for the deliverance of Israel in the time of his worthier successor Samuel.

Ver. 6.—*A man of God*, i. e. a prophet, applied to Moses, Samuel, David, Shemaiah, Elijah, Elisha, and other prophets, and to Timothy in the New Testament. Manoah's wife applies it to the angel, not being sure that he was not human. It would not be

improper to apply to an angel, seeing that *Gabriel* means *man of God*. *I asked him not*, &c. No doubt from awe. Jacob, on the contrary, asked the angel with whom he had wrestled, "Tell me, I pray thee, thy name" (Gen. xxxii. 29). See vers. 17, 18. In the Septuagint (Cod. Alex.) and Vulgate the *not* is omitted. "I asked him, but he did not tell me."

Ver. 10.—*And the woman . . . ran*, &c. Acting in the true spirit of a loving and trustful wife, and showing that she felt that neither angel nor man of God stood before her own husband in the claim to her confidence and obedience.

Ver. 12.—*Let thy words come*, &c. The verb is singular in the Hebrew here and in ver. 17. Possibly the true reading is *word*, as in the Septuagint. If the text is correct, *words* must be taken collectively, as making one promise. The saying marks Manoah's earnest desire for a son. Some, however, construe it, *If thy words come*. *How shall we order*, &c.—literally, *What will be the manner of the child*, and what will be his doing? i. e. either, *What will be his manner* (cf. 1 Sam. viii. 11, and following verses), and what will be his action or work? or, *What will be his proper treatment*, and what shall be done to him? The former is the most natural rendering of the words, and though the latter seems at first more suitable to the angel's reply, yet if we take the angel's reply as referring Manoah to what he had said before in vers. 4 and 5, we have a distinct answer to the questions. His *manner* will be to live as a Nazarite, and his action or work will be to begin to deliver Israel (cf. Gen. xvi. 12, where both the *manner* and the *actions* of Ishmael are foretold). In fact, Manoah's question refers directly to vers. 4 and 5, and is a request to have a confirmation of what was then said; just as David asked again and again, *What shall be done to the man that killeth this Philistine?* (1 Sam. xvii. 28, 30).

Ver. 14.—*She may not eat of anything*, &c. Nearly the identical words of Numb. vi. 4.

Ver. 15.—*Let us detain thee*, &c. He wishes to detain him as a guest till he has had time to cook a kid for him (cf. Gen. xviii. 7). *For thee*. The Hebrew is *before thee*. The phrase is elliptical. The full sentence would be, *until we have dressed a kid and set it before thee*, as in Gen. xviii. 8.

Ver. 16.—*I will not eat of thy bread*, &c. The angel refuses to eat of his meat, but suggests that if he would offer the kid as a burnt offering, he must offer it to the Lord. The angel, perhaps perceiving that Manoah was in doubt as to who he might be, had a holy dread lest he might offer the kid to him, just as the angel whom St. John

was about to worship said, "See thou do it not" (Rev. xxii. 9); and Barnabas and Paul ran in among the people of Lycaonia to restrain them from offering sacrifice to them (Acts xiv. 14—18). The order of the words, which is rightly given in the A. V., makes it a clear direction to offer the sacrifice to no one but the Lord.

Ver. 17.—*What is thy name?* See note to ver. 6. The phrase is very peculiar, literally, *Who is thy name?* as if he had been going to say, *Who art thou?* and then changed the form to *is thy name*. The Hebrews seem to have attached great importance to names, a circumstance due, in part, to every name being significant in the spoken language (see Gen. iv. 1, 25; v. 29; xvi. 5, &c.; xvii. 19; xxv. 25, 26; xxix. and xxx.; 1 Sam. i. xx.; Isa. ix. 6; lxii. 4; Jer. xxxiii. 6; Ephes. i. 21; Phil. ii. 9, 10; Rev. xix. 16, &c., and many other passages). Compare also the phrase, *the name of the Lord* (Isa. xxx. 27; Exod. xxxiii. 21; xxxiii. 19; xxxiv. 5, 6, 7). Manoah had certainly some suspicions as to the mysterious character of his visitor, and expected the name to reveal his true nature. We may do thee honour. Manoah seems throughout to use ambiguous language, suitable either to a man, if he was speaking to a man, or to a celestial visitant, should he be angel or God.

Ver. 18.—*It is secret.* The Hebrew word does not mean *secret*, but *wonderful*, as it is rendered in Isa. ix. 6, and elsewhere. His name was one which, as St. Paul expresses it, it is not lawful, or possible, for a man to utter (2 Cor. xii. 4), it was so transcendently wonderful. The feeling of the Hebrews in abstaining from uttering the name מַלְאָכִי was akin to this. Some take the angel to say that WONDERFUL is his name, but the A. V. is right in prefixing *seeing—seeing it is wonderful*.

Ver. 19.—*Offered it, &c.* He had the angel's sanction for doing so in ver. 16. But we must not look for strict compliance with the Levitical law in the lawless days of the Judges, though we find many of its prescribed ordinances in use, as, for instance, the institution of Nazarites, and here the offering of the meat offering with the burnt offering (Levit. ii. 1, &c.). And the angel. These words are rightly inserted, to give the sense of the original, as more fully explained in the following verse. *Did wonderfully*—literally, *was wondrous in his doing*. The verb here is the same root as the substantive or adjective *wonder*, or *wonderful*, in ver. 18. Compare the similar account in ch. vi. 21.

Ver. 20.—*Looked on it.* There is no occasion for the italic *it*, the phrase is identical with that at the close of ver. 19; but the rendering would be better, *And when Manoah and his wife saw it, they fell, &c.*

Ver. 21.—*But.* It is better rendered *and*, in close sequence to the preceding words. It follows, *Then, i.e.* when they saw him go up, *they knew that he was an angel.*

Ver. 22.—*We shall surely die, &c.* Similarly Gideon (ch. vi. 22, 23) expressed his alarm because he had "seen an angel of the Lord face to face," but was assured, "Thou shalt not die." And so Isaiah said, "Woe is me! for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts" (Isa. vi. 5). So again the Lord said to Moses, "There shall no man see me and live" (Exod. xxxiii. 20). The name of the well, Beer-lahai-roi, is also thought to mean the well of him that is alive after seeing God (Gen. xvi. 14). And Jacob called the name of the place where he wrestled with the angel Peniel, "for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved" (Gen. xxxii. 30). See too Exod. xx. 19. The same belief also prevailed amongst the heathen, that seeing a god without his special permission was visited by death or some grave calamity, as Callimachus, quoted by Grotius, says—

"The laws of Saturn thus decree,
Who dares immortal gods to see
Shall suffer loss, whoe'er he be."

Ver. 23.—*But his wife said, &c.* The woman's faith saw more clearly than the man's fear. With the acceptance of the sacrifice the conscience was cleared from guilt. The ascent of the angel in the flame of the altar was to her the same evidence of an accepted sacrifice as the resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus are to us.

Ver. 24.—*Called his name Samson.* No doubt the name was significant of what the child should be (see note to ver. 17), but the etymology and meaning of the name are doubtful. Josephus ('Antiq.' V. viii. 4) says the name means "a strong one," but he does not say in what language, and it does not appear to have such a meaning in any Semitic dialect. It is commonly interpreted to mean *like the sun*, from *shemesh*, the common word for the sun; and so Jerome in his 'Onomasticon' expounds it as *the sun's strength*, possibly with an allusion to ch. v. 31. Others make it equal *shimshom*, from the Pilpel conjugation of *shamem*, to devastate. Another possible derivation is from the Chaldee *shemash*, to minister, specially in sacred things, a root from which the Nestorian, Syriac, and Arabic names for a deacon are derived. If this were the derivation, it would be a reference to his dedication to God as a Nazarite from his mother's womb, the only thing his mother knew about him when she gave him the name.

Ver. 25.—*The Spirit of the Lord, &c.* See ch. iii. 10, note. To move him—to urge and impel him to strange actions by fits

and starts. It is an uncommon expression. In Gen. xli. 8 the passive of the verb means to be *troubled* or *agitated*, and the substantive is the common word for a *time* in the phrases *time after time*, *twice*, *thrice* (according to the number specified), *other times*, &c.; also a *footstep*; and its derivatives mean an *anvil*, a *bell*. The idea is that of sudden, single impulses, such as are described in the following chapters. In the camp of Dan,

or, as in ch. xviii. 12, *Mahanah-Dan*, where the reason of the name is explained. For *Zorah* see ver. 2, note. *Eshtaol* has not hitherto been identified with any existing place, but it ought to lie east or north of Mahaneh-Dan, since this last was between Zorah and Eshtaol (see note on ch. xviii. 12). *Kustul*, a conical hill one hour west of Jerusalem, has been suggested.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—25.—*Married life.* Many deep and valuable teachings may be gathered out of this chapter. The ministry of angels to the heirs of salvation, and, connected with it, the sublime conception of the countless hosts of heaven; for the presence of one angel upon earth brings tidings, as it were, from distant spheres of principalities and powers, of thrones and dominions, of angels and authorities, of cherubim and seraphim, peopling the realms of space, filling the heavens with intelligence and praise, and having a community with mankind in the grace and love of God; and one converse of an angel with men suggests a future intercourse of inconceivable wealth of enjoyment, and unbounded variety of interchange of thought, and a fellowship in adoration and praise with unnumbered worlds of holy and mighty intelligences. The mysterious nature of the angel of the Lord, baffling all human attempts to explain it—at one moment seeming quite separate from the Godhead itself, and next moment seeming to be one with it, as if a kind of anticipation of the incarnation were taking place, and God himself were speaking by the angel's mouth. And then there is the predestinating grace of God, calling into being whom he will, assigning to his creature his proper work, and marking out his future course before he was born; endowing him with great and singular gifts, pouring freely and fully upon him his Holy Spirit, and yet leaving his free will unshackled, and his responsibility unimpaired. And there is the doctrine of sacrifice, and of answers to prayer; and there is the question of temperance, and total abstinence from the fruit of the vine; and the duty of hospitality, and of gratitude for kindness received; and that of giving honour to whom honour, and worship to whom worship is due, and other lessons besides. But the one lesson which stands out above the others and runs through the whole chapter is that of the conjugal relation of man and wife, which is set forth with inimitable simplicity and force, and which we shall do well to study for a few minutes as one that bears with singular influence upon the happiness and well-being of mankind. It is obvious to notice in the first place that Manoah was the husband of one wife, according to the institution of marriage in paradise. Such mutual confidence and help as we here see could not have been found in Gideon's harem, or in the households of Ibzan and Abdon. The real conjugal union of interests, and oneness of aim, and transparent openness of intercourse springing from having nothing to conceal, can have no existence where polygamy exists. Nor is it in the nature of things that a woman's entire love and trust should be given to the man who has only a fraction of affection to give in return. If Christianity had done nothing else for mankind than restore the primitive law of marriage, and guard it with the highest sanctions of religion, it would have conferred upon our race an inestimable boon. The holiness and happiness, the peace and union, of countless homes, is due to the marriage law of the gospel of Christ. But then this law must be kept in the spirit as well as in the letter. The conduct of Manoah's wife after her first interview with the angel is a beautiful exemplification of this spirit in the wife: "Then the woman came and told her husband." Many things might have moved her to secrecy. The fear of exciting her husband's suspicions, the risk of being disbelieved, the possibility that the stranger had deceived her with false hopes; or, on the other hand, a feeling of pride and self-sufficiency at the marvellous apparition and revelation made to herself, not to her husband, and a spirit of independence engendered by such a distinction—such feelings as these, had they existed, or had they ruled her conduct, might have led her to conceal the mysterious interview. But

the wife's instinct led her straight to the mark: "she came and told her husband." He was her husband, her natural, legitimate, only counsellor and adviser. His was the ear into which to pour her strange confidence. What she knew, he ought to know, and her conduct must be guided by his counsels. So she came at once and told her husband. But the lesson has peculiar force from the supposed office of the stranger. She took him for "a man of God," and his very announcement of what was to happen hereafter invested him with a sacred and awful character, which was likely to affect powerfully the sensibilities of a woman. But not for one instant was "the man of God" allowed to stand between her and her husband. She had no secrets for the "man of God" which were to be hidden from her husband, nor had the angel any counsel to give which her husband was not to know of. It was on the second time of his appearing as on the first: "she made haste, and ran, and showed her husband, and said unto him, Behold, the man hath appeared unto me." It is a very forcible lesson to the effect that no pretence of spiritual authority can justify interference with the laws of nature, which are the laws of God. If the mutual love and mutual confidence between man and wife in the holy estate of matrimony is the ordinance of God for the happiness of man, the secret influence of another man which is to override the influence of the husband is not, and cannot be, according to the will of God. If the wife is to obey her husband, no other man can of right exact a higher obedience; if she is to trust her husband, she may not keep secret from him what she reveals to others; she may not receive counsel from others which is to be hid from him. The function of a confessor and spiritual director is incompatible with the Christian law of marriage, as it is with the "first commandment with promise," when it stands between children and their parents. Nor is Manoah's trust in his wife less conspicuous than her trust in him. Not a shadow of doubt as to the truth of her statement crossed his mind, not a shade of jealousy that the message came to her rather than to him. In the desire for further information his wisdom suggested prayer that the Lord would send again the man of God; but the language of his prayer was beautifully expressive of the union that was betwixt them two. "Let the man of God come again unto us, and teach us what we shall do unto the child." And when the second time the angel appeared to the woman alone, he took it as the answer to his prayer. As she came quickly to him, so he quickly followed her. With manly courage he asked the questions which her feminine modesty had not dared to put, and appeared at once in his proper place, ordering and directing what was to be done with regard to the rites of hospitality and piety; and yet when his own fears were excited by having seen the angel of God, he sought counsel from his wife, and readily acquiesced in her pious trust in the mercy and loving-kindness of the Lord. And exactly the same perfect union between them appears many years afterwards, when Samson was grown up (ch. xiv. 2—5), so that the whole passage is a beautiful idyll of conjugal love and concord. They both fulfil their proper parts with the utmost simplicity and propriety; they both contribute to the common stock of wedded happiness what each had to contribute; neither of them had one word of reproach or bitterness to the other; neither of them attempted to usurp the other's place, or shrunk from occupying their own. And they have left for our study and imitation as beautiful an example of the mutual help and harmony of married life as is to be found in the whole range of Scripture. May it find its counterpart in every Christian family in the land!

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 2—5.—*A natural desire and its gracious fulfilment.* In the East it is a reproach to be childless, and the greatest anxiety is displayed by married people to have a son. In ancient times the possibility of becoming the mother of the promised Messiah was a hope which greatly influenced this, but it had its root in the natural longing to continue one's name and influence after death. This "will to live," which is so strong in the natural man, God sanctified by religious sanctions. It is ever a healthful and lawful desire when the "chief end" of man is respected.

"Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey,
Where wealth accumulates and men decay."

The natural life of man or woman is incomplete apart from the married state, and children are the blessing and crown of marriage. But they may also be its curse. It is only as God shapes their destiny and moulds their character, only as he "builds the house," that happiness and prosperity can be insured. Improvident marriages and parental neglect have been amongst the greatest causes of misery and vice in all ages. As in later ages we have learnt that there is no virtue in being a mother, so we have discovered that the single life is not the only possible one for the saint.

I. GOD DELIGHTS IN GRATIFYING OUR LEGITIMATE NATURAL DESIRES. It is but fitting that he who made us as we are constituted should supply, or place within our reach, that which shall satisfy our natural cravings. To do otherwise would be a refined and terrible cruelty. But our sin has forfeited for us this claim upon his providence. It would be perfectly lawful for him to withdraw natural supplies, and leave a rebellious world to perish, because of a broken covenant. But it has been far otherwise. The providence of God has been extolled by the heathen as by the Christian, by the sinner and the saint. He makes his sun to rise and his rain to fall upon the just and the unjust. Save his grace, there is no more pathetic and wonderful thing in the doings of God than this persistent and impartial providence. And in visitations like this to Manoah's wife we have glimpses of the feeling which inspires it. A real pleasure is felt by our Father in helping and gratifying his children. The mother has no more pleasure in giving suck to her infant than God has in making it possible for her to do so. Care and interest like this prepare us for the grander exhibitions of his grace in the gift of his only begotten Son. It could only be sustained in the breast of one who "so loved the world." A part of this Divine love is due, doubtless, to the possibility of some of those he fosters becoming his spiritual children and heirs of his kingdom.

II. HE DOES IT IN SUCH A MANNER AS TO IMPRESS UPON THE SUBJECT OF THE BLESSING THE SACREDNESS OF THE GOD-GIVEN LIFE, AND THE TRUE GLORY OF MOTHERHOOD. The child promised is to be devoted to God from his birth. His whole life is to be a Divine service. A special commission is to be given him for the deliverance of God's people. To this end a life of self-denial—a Nazarite life—is to be his. This conception of Samson's future is typical and representative. Every first-born in Israel was so regarded. And every child should be so regarded, and taught so to regard himself or herself. There is nothing so beautiful under the sun as a life wholly and from beginning to end devoted to God. And this, though it may seem a hard and difficult thing to realise, is the shortest and truest way to happiness. The mother of such a child—every mother—is therefore called upon to sanctify herself, that her offspring shall receive from her no evil tendencies or desires. Hereditary influence is everywhere recognised throughout Scripture.

III. THE OFFSPRING THUS GRANTED IS MADE THE INSTRUMENT OF BLESSING AND DELIVERANCE TO HIS PEOPLE. There are always considerations for and against granting a boon outside and independently of the ordinary course of nature. Consecration of the gift thus bestowed is the surest way of avoiding injustice to others, and justifying our own super-abounding good. What a thought this for every mother to ponder! In lesser proportion and degree hers may be the wonder and forethought of Mary, the mother of our Lord, when "she hid these things in her heart."—M.

Ver. 5.—*The difficulty of salvation.* "And he shall begin to deliver Israel." There is a parsimony of expression here that is highly expressive. It is not said, "he shall deliver," as of a complete work, but only "he shall begin" to do so. How many reasons were there for this! Do they not also hold good for the grander work of human salvation?

I. HINDRANCES TO THE COMPLETE SALVATION OF ISRAEL. 1. *It was a work which required to be, in the first place, and mainly, spiritual in order to its being thorough.* 2. *In order to this the penalty of past transgression had in greater measure to be felt.* The transgression had been great, repeated, and habitual. A stern lesson had to be read to the guilty. It was an evil inflicted in order to induce repentance. The moral depths of human nature were being sounded and discovered to itself, that in the fulness of time a Divine Saviour might be sought. 3. *Meanwhile the nature and*

character of the deliverer did not admit of such a work being completed. He was but a man: his consecration was merely or chiefly external; the faults of his character were glaring. His deeds, accordingly, are those of physical heroism and strength. Only once or twice do any hints of more than human wisdom occur.

II. CONSOLATIONS ATTACHED TO THIS INCOMPLETE SALVATION. 1. *It was actually begun.* 2. *God had undertaken it, and provided the instrument.* 3. *As being a professedly partial undertaking, it showed a far-reaching and thorough scheme.* 4. *The conditions of its ultimate accomplishment were with themselves.*—M.

Vers. 2—5.—*God's use of unlikely means for gracious ends.* The crisis was grave, relief being, humanly speaking, impossible. The family chosen for the experiment an ordinary one, of no social standing. The mother of the promised child barren. The sustenance enjoined of the most meagre description, not likely to produce strength or furnish artificial stimulus. No inward holiness is shown by Samson.

I. IT SHOWS A PURPOSE OF ENGAGING THE SINNER, EITHER PERSONALLY OR REPRESENTATIVELY, IN THE TASK OF HIS OWN SALVATION. The humblest transgressor cannot be saved without his own self-surrender and willing co-operation.

II. THE HIGHER SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLES, FAITH, HOPE, &c., ARE EVOKED IN THOSE WHO ARE THUS SAVED. The human agent is thus put in his right place. He secures the sympathies of his fellow-countrymen. Their hopes rise or fall as he prospers or is hindered in his task. The blessing of God must therefore be invoked, and the promise of God implicitly believed.

III. ALL THE GIFTS OF OUR NATURE ARE SHOWN TO BE DIVINE IN THEIR ORIGIN, AND THEIR CONSECRATION IS ENCOURAGED.

IV. THE SAVING GRACE OF GOD IS THUS VINDICATED AS HIS OWN, AND HE HIMSELF DECLARED THE ONLY SAVIOUR.—M.

Vers. 1—5.—*Divine punishment and preparation of deliverance simultaneous.* The heaviest judgments in human history have been secretly charged with such merciful provisions. This circumstance alters the character of the infliction; it ceases to be mere vengeance, and becomes discipline.

I. INSTANCES OF THIS IN SACRED HISTORY. The Fall and promise of the Seed. In Joseph's sale and slavery we see the *anticipation* of an evil not yet experienced. Esther is raised up in the Persian captivity. The age of the destruction of Jerusalem was the age of the gospel.

II. WHAT THIS PROVES. 1. *God does not "afflict willingly" and for the sake of afflicting, but for ultimate good.* 2. *The wrath of God exists at the same time as his love, and is penetrated and overruled by it.* 3. *The mercy of God is far-seeing, wise, and painstaking.*—M.

Vers. 8—11.—*Repetition of Divine favours.* There are visitations of God and signs of his favour that are not fully comprehended the first time, and their repetition alone can satisfy the cravings of the heart and the wonder of the spiritual understanding. And God is considerate of our human weakness. "In the mouth of *two or three* witnesses shall every word be established." The blessing is then realised in absolute certainty, and a communion of faith.

I. GOD'S PROMISES ARE SO PRECIOUS THAT WE WISH TO BE ASSURED OF THEM. His words, so mysterious and far-sent, are like clouds full of rain for the thirsty soil, if we can only secure the blessing. When he condescends to visit thus the home of men it is for good, and not evil. And the blessings which he promises are not such as the world can give. The spiritual understanding can alone discern their true worth, and alone yearns for their fulfilment. The mere repetition of the terms and words is soothing and confirming. And to the faithful they will be spoken again as a token of favour, and the signs will be repeated; but to a "faithless generation shall no sign be given," save that which plunges in deeper wonder or increases the certainty of doom.

II. HOW ARE GOD'S PROMISES TO BE REALISED? 1. *By interested attention to them.* Manoah's mind is full of the message received by his wife. He does not

dismiss it from mind and memory as a trifling thing. It is this pondering and waiting and searching spirit that is blessed. "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" 2. *By implicit faith.* He does not question the reality of the Divine message. He is eager to hear it, so that all its significance may be understood. He speaks even at first of "the child that shall be born." 3. *By believing prayer.* How earnest is this man! "Manoah entreated Jehovah." There is no unnecessary delay: "God hearkened to the voice of Manoah." He loves to hear the voice of praying men. He loves to be "inquired of," and "entreated," and "wrestled" with. "The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." 4. *By expectation, and diligent watching for the answer.* The reality of our prayer is thus shown. How often is prayer but an idle word uttered thoughtlessly when in a devout frame! Let us look for what we ask, and God will not weary our patience or betray our confidence. Ask, seek, knock (2 Tim. iv. 8; Titus ii. 13).—M.

Vers. 12—14.—*Parental anxiety and its satisfying.* Questions of great importance, which every parent ought to study. Circumstances may occur that render the responsibility of the parent peculiarly heavy.

I. ALL PARENTS, OR THOSE ABOUT TO BE PARENTS, SHOULD BRING THEIR PARENTAL CARES TO GOD. 1. *It will relieve anxiety.* 2. *The sense of moral responsibility will be deepened and confirmed.* 3. *Direction will be given for duty and usefulness.*

II. THE BEST SAFEGUARD OF THE CHILD IS THE CONSECRATION OF THE PARENT. To regard the child-blessing as a trust. To seek the benefit of others through that which is a joy and gratification to oneself. To keep oneself pure and temperate, that no taint or evil tendency may pass to one's posterity, and that in oneself, as in one's children, God may be glorified.—M.

Vers. 15—21.—Cf. on ch. vi. 17—21.—M.

Vers. 17, 18.—*The wonderful name.* The balance of critical authority is in favour of the rendering "wonderful," or wonder-working, and not that of "secret." It is to be taken as expressive not only of the general character of God as mysterious, glorious, and ineffable, but as doing wonders, *i. e.* mighty deeds of manifestation and salvation. This characteristic of God is to be studied as—

I. PROVOCATIVE OF CURIOSITY. The Divine element has ever maintained its presence in human life, has kept the horizons of human consciousness wide apart and constantly extending, and has exercised the counteractive and saving influence required by the action of the world-spirit upon the nature of man. God has never left man alone. Ere a single page of inspiration was penned he dwelt "in the conscious breast," and drew reverent eyes and feet after his marvels in the physical world. Man is, perforce of his moral constitution being linked and blended with his physical, a being "between two worlds." The gate is ajar, and no mortal can ever effectually close it. Led by this "presence of the threshold," the fathers of faith began that religious movement that received its loftiest impulse and satisfaction in Christ. There were partial and progressive revelations, each new "wonder" laying firmer hold upon the imagination and the heart. Jacob at Bethel and at Peniel (Gen. xxxii. 24—30), Moses at Horeb, Elijah in the cave of the desert, and David at the threshing-floor of Araunah, are grand typical figures, milestones in this spiritual pilgrimage. And there is no individual life, even of this secularised modern world, that is not the theatre of "even greater works than these," speaking in it of a heavenly Father, and keeping it within sound of his voice. If we are true to our own inner selves and to our spiritual history we must be worshippers of him whose name is Wonderful.

II. IN PROCESS OF REVELATION THROUGH MIRACLES. "And the angel did wondrously," *i. e.* true to his name, he acted miraculously. Creation, providence, the unfolding work of the world's salvation, are so many series of revelations in act and work. The general impression produced upon the mind by the scheme of the universe is enhanced and led up into religious fervour by these miracles, of which our latest physical science does not well know how to dispose. The moral and spiritual lessons they teach, and the impression they produce upon the human heart, run

parallel with, but indefinitely above, the ordinary lines of (so-called) "natural religion," and constitute a distinct revelation, of which the core is reached in the miracles of Jesus Christ. As this moral or Divine side of miracle is increasingly studied, the riches of the Word made flesh will grow upon us, fascinate and convert the soul. At the tribunal of Jerusalem the old, old question is asked anew, and again in effect is the answer returned, "My name is Wonderful."

III. ASSERTIVE OF JEHOVAH AS THE SUPERNATURAL CAUSE OF THE DELIVERANCE OF ISRAEL. It is not Moses, or any judge, or David even, who is able to save. Jehovah is the great Deliverer, and he works above nature in a realm in which he can have no co-worker. Samson even is a "child of the promise," and no product of the influences of his time. His strength is to be from above, and its great exercises and feats are distinctly miraculous.

IV. PREPARING MEN FOR THE MESSIAH, IN WHOM IT WAS MOST PERFECTLY MANIFESTED. The depths of the world's consciousness, in seer and saint, are ceaselessly stirred until the look of the ages fastens itself on him whose name is "Wonderful, Counsellor, mighty God, everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isa. ix. 6). And as we look back on the brief episode of his life, ever new wonders declare themselves, and we feel that his example, his sufferings, his sacrifice, his resurrection, and ascension are potent to save and to sanctify, &c. Truly "his name is Wonderful."—M.

Vers. 22, 23.—*Reassurance of Divine favour.* Manoah is now uncertain whether to consider himself blessed or miserable. He has the deep-rooted superstition of a fleshly age strong within him, and is alarmed. But this arises from a defective spiritual education. He does not consider sufficiently the method and the manner of God's approaches to him.

I. FEAR REGARDING GOD'S VISITATIONS IS A NATURAL FEELING. The consciousness of sin is easily roused to alarm, and the unknown is ever awe-inspiring. Our own littleness too is made the more manifest: "What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?" (Ps. viii. 4).

II. HOW IT MAY BE OVERCOME. *Considering, 1. The character of God; 2. His continuous scheme of redemption; 3. The blessings he has already bestowed; 4. The voice of Christ ("Fear not"), and the witness of the Spirit ("Abba, Father").*

III. GOD WILL NOT LEAVE HIS CHILD IN UNCERTAINTY OF HIS MEANING. "Two are better than one." How often in life is the husband, wife, parent, child, brother, sister, or friend, close beside us, the witness of God and the spiritual help-meet! The simple soul teaches the more complex and experienced, being itself taught of God. And so, somewhere or other, he is never without a witness.—M.

Vers. 24, 25.—*Fulfilment of promise.* The history of this promise to the worthy pair reads like an unbroken tale. Outwardly it was with them only as it was with numberless others of their neighbours. The circumstance is woven into the web of contemporary village life. The birth is as any other, the child as any other, up to a certain point; and then the true character and destiny begin to declare themselves.

I. THE ORDINARY ASPECT OF DIVINE FULFILMENTS IN THEIR BEGINNINGS.

II. PRIVATE JOY AND SATISFACTION ACCOMPANYING THE GIFT OF A PUBLIC BENEFACITOR AND FULFILLER OF THE DIVINE PURPOSE. "The Lord blessed him."

III. THE GRADUAL DIFFERENTIATION OF THE DIVINE AGENT FROM THE MERELY HUMAN RELATION. It soon appears that the lad is not meant for the mere solace of his parents' age and light of their home. "The Spirit of the Lord began to move him at times." Like Christ, the time comes when he "must be about his Father's business."—M.

Ver. 5.—*Samson the Nazarite.* I. THERE ARE MEN WHOM GOD CALLS TO HIS SERVICE FROM THEIR BIRTH. This is seen in the fact that the earliest events of their lives are made to train them for their subsequent mission in the world. Parents should consecrate their children to God in infancy, and not wait for later years before using those means which will fit them for the work of life in God's service. Manoah and his wife are taught these lessons with special reference to the condition of a Nazarite. Other vocations may require external varieties of training, but the essen-

JUDGES.

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tial characteristics which fit us for the service of God are the same in all cases, so that it is not necessary to know the exact form of service to which God will call a child, in order to lay the foundations of his character in the main principles which devotion to God's service in any form involves.

II. ABSTEMIOUSNESS IS FAVOURABLE TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF VIGOUR. Self-indulgence is enervating. Self-restraint both husbands and enlarges strength. That which is apparently most helpful to us may prove in reality to be a hindrance. Appetite and desire are neither to be regarded as masters nor as enemies, but as servants. As wine excites rather than strengthens, so there are influences of a mental character which add nothing to our power for work, although they appear to do so by rousing excitement. The soul will not grow strong on the heating, but not nourishing, diet of religious sensationalism.

III. DEVOTION TO GOD REQUIRES PURITY OF LIFE. The Nazarite was to touch no unclean thing. Unhappily Samson was satisfied with this ceremonial purity, and did not cultivate purity of soul, as the spirit of the Nazarite's vow plainly required him to do; hence his moral weakness and failure to attain perfect success. Samson "began to deliver Israel," he was not able to finish. Only the spotless One could say, "It is finished." In proportion to our holiness will be our spiritual strength. Religious devotion without moral purity cannot be accepted by God (Isa. i. 11—15).

IV. FULNESS OF LIFE BELONGS TO THOSE WHO LIVE TO GOD. No razor, no iron (the symbol of death), was to come upon the Nazarite. Consecration to God involves self-denial, but it brings a deeper joy and a fuller life than a self-seeking course will secure. 1. Religion does not require the destruction of any part of our true human nature, not even to the injuring of one hair of the head. 2. Religion requires the consecration of our whole being unmaimed, even to the not severing of one hair of the head from the perfect sacrifice.

V. CONSECRATION TO GOD IS A SOURCE OF USEFULNESS TO MEN. Samson was a Nazarite; he was also a deliverer of his people. God calls us not to the hermit's life of useless devotion, but to the servant's life of devotion practised in active good works. The religiousness which forbids useful work in commerce, in politics, in literature is a false sentiment. The Christian can best serve God by labouring for the good of his fellow-men.—A.

Ver. 8.—*The training of children.* I. CHILDREN NEED TRAINING. 1. Children do not attain to the best character and conduct *spontaneously*, by natural growth and development. Left to themselves they would make little progress and many errors. But they cannot be thus left. If good influences are not brought to bear upon them, they cannot be entirely shielded from evil influences which will prove fatal unless they are counteracted. Training is necessary (1) to assist and promote the natural development of the good which is already in children, (2) to check and eradicate hereditary tendencies to sin derived from parents, *e. g.* the inclinations to intemperance likely to be felt by the children of the intemperate, and (3) to counteract the effect of the temptations of the world. 2. Children do not attain to the best character and conduct *without care and effort*. They need specific training. Example does much; the atmosphere of a Christian society is also effective. Yet these general and vague, though real and powerful, influences are not sufficient without definite teaching and personal discipline. Christianity must be taught, and it cannot be learnt from any spirit of Christianity in the air.

II. THE TRAINING OF CHILDREN SHOULD BEGIN EARLY. The danger accompanying the process of intellectual forcing which results in unnatural precocity is not so great in moral training. The intellect need not be taxed with complex dogmas, nor the feelings stirred with unhealthy emotions, and yet children may be trained in integrity and unselfishness, in love to God and man—the great fundamental principles of the highest moral character. It is foolish to postpone this training. It is most easy when the mind is plastic. A natural economy would teach us that it is better that the whole life should be right from the first, than that there should be an early time of mistakes and faults and a subsequent conversion to better things.

III. THE SUPREME END OF THE TRAINING OF CHILDREN SHOULD BE TO FIT THEM

FOR THE SERVICE OF GOD. Samson is to be trained for God. Parents are too negligent of the highest ends of their children's lives. Careful to preserve their health and develop their natural powers of body and mind, anxious to instruct them in useful and liberalising secular knowledge, energetic in securing them a prosperous career in the world, parents often forget the real purpose of life, and fail to fit their children for the great mission of serving God. Children should be regarded as God's from their birth, and as only lent by him. The significance of baptism, as implying God's claim on the children and their dedication to him, should be remembered in all the subsequent training of them.

IV. THE CHIEF RESPONSIBILITY OF THE TRAINING OF CHILDREN RESTS ON THEIR PARENTS. This cannot be delegated to teachers. Though the work may be largely done by special teachers, the responsibility still remains on the father and mother, and can never be shifted. They too have the most influence by the constant intercourse of home, the force of parental example, authority, and affection, their knowledge of their children and interest in them.

V. GUIDANCE FOR THE TRAINING OF CHILDREN SHOULD BE SOUGHT FROM GOD. Manoaah and his wife show their humility, their faith, and their devotion in praying for guidance. This is necessary for many reasons. The issues of the work are supremely important; error may lead to fearful disaster. The execution of the work is exceedingly difficult. The ideal to be aimed at is great and high. There is mystery in the character of every soul, mystery in the will of God as to its destiny, mystery in the innumerable subtle influences which play upon it. He who realises these things will seek light as to the end of the training of the children and the method of pursuing it.—A.

Vers. 17, 18.—*The mystery of a name.* Names denote persons and describe characters. The nameless one wraps both his individuality and his nature in mystery. Naturally Manoaah, like Jacob, desires to solve such a mystery (Gen. xxxii. 29), and in response to this wish, unlike "the traveller unknown," the angel reveals a name, though one of partial mystery.

I. MANOAH'S QUESTION (see ver. 17). 1. *Manoaah does not know that his visitor is an angel of the Lord* (ver. 16). Divine visitations are not always recognised. The true nature of Christ was unknown to most of his contemporaries. We cannot always trace the hand of God in his providential action. Heaven is about us unnoticed; unseen ministries attend our lives; God is nearer to us than we suspect. 2. *Manoaah desires to know the name of his mysterious visitor*—(1) from natural curiosity, (2) from a desire to strengthen his faith in the message of the unknown, (3) from a wish to give him thanks when his promise should be fulfilled. The thirst to solve the strange questions which surround our spiritual life is natural, and not inconsistent with humility nor with faith. It would be better if we were more anxious to inquire for indications of God and of his character in the experience of life.

II. THE ANGEL'S REPLY (see ver. 18). 1. *He begins his reply with a question.* We should not assail heaven with unjustifiable prayers, but should be ready to give a reason for our petitions. Revelation is not intended to quench human thought, but to stimulate it. Every new voice from heaven, while it answers some questions, starts new questions. 2. *The angel implies that Manoaah's request was needless,* either (1) because he ought to have recognised the nature of his visitant from the character of his message and conduct, or (2) because it was more important to consider the meaning of the message than to inquire into the nature of the messenger. We sometimes pray for more light when we only need better eyes to use the light we have; not a fresh revelation, but discernment, reflection, spiritual feeling to appreciate the revelation already received. God's truth is more important than the person of the prophet, apostle, or angel who brings it to us. 3. *The angel gives Manoaah a name.* He is "Wonderful." This was a partial answer to Manoaah's question. (1) It carried his thought to God, who is the supreme mystery, and suggested the greatness, the wonder, the awe of all that pertained to him. Thus it was a revelation of the Divine. (2) Nevertheless the name was but a partial explanation, as its very meaning suggested the unknown. The deepest questions cannot be solved

on earth. But it matters little that the rays of revelation seem to melt into the darkness of the Infinite if only they shine bright and clear on our path of duty.—A.

Vers. 22, 23.—*The fear of the vision of God.* The Divine vision was connected with a blessing to Manoah and his wife. The vision of God by the soul is itself the highest blessing; yet, as in the case of Manoah, it fills men with fear.

I. THE CAUSE OF THE FEAR. 1. *Mystery.* We naturally dread the unknown. Darkness hides possibilities of danger. Superstition peoples the unseen with horrors. 2. *Guilt.* "Conscience makes cowards of us all." So Adam and Eve hid themselves from God in the garden (Gen. iii. 8). Because we are all sinners before God we have a natural shrinking from him (1) who knows our secret hearts, (2) against whom we have offended, (3) who is holy to hate sin and (4) just to punish it. 3. *Unbelief.* We do not sufficiently understand the character of God nor trust his grace. If we did, we should feel safer with all our guilt in his hands than we are when left to ourselves and to the world. Men fear God because they do not know him.

II. THE REMEDIES OF THE FEAR. Manoah's wife encourages her husband. Though men may be brave before physical danger, women sometimes show more courage in spiritual difficulties. This moral courage is nobler than the brute courage which man shares with the lower animals. It has its source in true excellences of character.

1. *Self-possession.* Manoah is confused and dismayed by terror beyond the power of reflection; but his wife is calm and collected, and thus able to see indications of mercy in the vision. 2. *Reflection* on the character of the vision. God has given to us powers of observation, discernment, reasoning. Superstitious terrors more commonly haunt the minds of those people who have neglected to use those powers, while weakly yielding to foolish emotions. Religion to be healthy must be thoughtful. God has given us sufficient indications of his character in the Bible, in Christ, in life, to deliver us from slavish fear, if only we consider and reflect on these. The more we know of God, the less shall we be afraid of him. May not the most fearful learn to reason with Manoah's wife—"If God had meant harm to us, would he have blessed us as he has done hitherto?" The Christian may go further, and be sure that after the great gift of his Son, God must wish well to us in all lesser things (Rom. v. 10). 3. *Faith.* We cannot see perfect evidence that God is blessing us in every mystery; but if we know his character we ought to trust his actions, even when they seem most alarming, as they cannot be contrary to his nature. 4. *The acceptance of sacrifice.* God had accepted Manoah's sacrifice, therefore he could not regard him with disfavour. He has accepted the sacrifice of Christ, and accordingly our guilt need not make us fear God if we rely on the atonement Christ has effected.—A.

Vers. 24, 25.—*The young Samson.* I. HIS NAME. Samson—the sun. This was a great name, full of inspiring significance. It is well to have a good name, one which is a constant appeal to a man to be worthy of it, and to live up to its meaning.

II. HIS GROWTH. Samson the hero was first a child at the mercy of the weakest. The grandest river springs from a little streamlet. The noblest man enters life, as the meanest does, in helpless infancy. So the spiritual life of the saint, the martyr, the apostle is seen first in him as in a babe in Christ. It is therefore no dishonour to have a small beginning, but it is a dishonour to remain small. The one question is, Do we grow mentally, spiritually, in knowledge, in holiness, in power? There is more to be expected of the minute growing seed than of the dead stump, which is at first vastly larger. Better be a growing child of the Lord than a dwarf adult Christian man.

III. HIS BLESSING. "The Lord blessed him." We are not told how; this matters not. Perhaps he did not recognise the blessing. God blesses us silently, with no formal benediction, and perhaps in ways which to us seem hard and injurious. Still better than health, riches, pleasure is the fact God does give a man the thing that is for his highest good, which is what we mean by "a blessing."

IV. HIS INSPIRATION. "The Spirit of the Lord began to move him." 1. Samson's heroic strength was an inspiration of God, not a mere brute muscular force. We see

how in great crises men are nerved to do what is beyond their power in ordinary life. The abnormal strength of insanity is an instance of the same principle, applied in circumstances of disease. 2. Inspiration assumes various forms. To Samson it brought neither the grace of purity nor the gift of prophecy; but it gave him the special gifts which he needed for his special work. He would have been a nobler man if he had sought the Spirit of God also to help him in more spiritual ways. Samson had a supernatural gift of the Spirit with little of its ordinary grace of holiness. It is better to have this grace first, though, if God will, we may receive the gift also.

V. HIS IMPERFECT POSSESSION BY THE SPIRIT. He was moved at times. 1. God's special gifts are *limited to occasion*. There is an economy of Divine power. When we need extraordinary grace he will give this, but only then. 2. The receipt of spiritual gifts depends on the *condition of our spirit*. Samson was only rightly disposed to receive the Spirit at intervals. Our spiritual life fluctuates; we are not long at our best. 3. We are only moved when we *respond*. God may have visited Samson more often than Samson profited by his visit. We can resist the Spirit. We are helped only when we willingly yield to it.—A.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XIV.

Ver. 1. — *Timnath*, or, more correctly, *Thimnathah*, as in Josh. xix. 43, a town in the tribe of Dan, the name of which survives in the modern *Tibneh*, about three miles south-west of Zorah (ch. xiii. 2, note). It may or may not be identical with Timnath in Gen. xxxviii. 12—14, and with *Timnah* in Josh. xv. 10. It appears to have been in the possession of the Philistines at this time.

Ver. 2. — *Get her, &c.* Rather, *take her*. It is the technical phrase (1) for a man taking a wife for himself, as Gen. iv. 19; vi. 2; 1 Sam. xxv. 39, 43, and vers. 3, 8 of this chapter; (2) for a man's parents taking a wife for him, as Exod. xxxiv. 16; Neh. x. 30. The parents of the bridegroom paid the dowry agreed upon (see Gen. xxxiv. 12; 1 Sam. xviii. 25).

Ver. 3. — *Uncircumcised*. Cf. Gen. xxxiv. 14. A term of reproach here added to deter Samson from the marriage. It is particularly applied to the Philistines (see ch. xv. 18; 1 Sam. xvii. 26, 36; xviii. 29; xxxi. 4; 2 Sam. i. 20, &c.).

Ver. 4. — *It was of or from the Lord*. It was the method decreed by God's providence for bringing about a rupture with the Philistines. *That he sought*. Rather, *because he sought*. The writer explains the purpose of the providence. It is doubtful whether "he" refers to Samson or to the Lord. Most commentators refer it to Samson; but it is contrary to the whole tenor of Samson's impetuous course, and to all probability, that he should have asked for the Timnathite damsel merely for the sake of quarrelling with the Philistines; whereas the statement that Samson's obstinate determination to take a Philistine wife was the means which God's secret purpose had fixed upon for bringing about the

eventual overthrow of the Philistine dominion is in exact accordance with other declarations of Holy Scripture (cf. e. g. Exod. vii. 3, 4; Josh. xi. 20; 1 Sam. ii. 25; 1 Kings xii. 15; 2 Chron. x. 15; xxii. 7; xxv. 20). *An occasion*. The noun only occurs here; but the verb, in its several conjugations, means, *to happen at the right time; to bring a person or thing at the right time* (Exod. xxi. 13, *deliver*, A. V.); *to be brought at the right time* (Prov. xii. 21, *happen*, A. V.); *to seek the right time for injuring any one* (2 Kings v. 7, *seeketh a quarrel*, A. V.).

Ver. 5. — *Went down*, showing that Timnath was on lower ground than Zorah; it was in fact in the *Shephelah*. The vineyards of Timnath. The valley of Sorek (ch. xvi. 4), so famous for its vines (Isa. v. 2; Jer. ii. 21), from which it derived its name (*Sorek*, translated in the above passages the *choicest vine*, and a *noble vine*), is thought to have been in the immediate neighbourhood. Probably the whole district under the hills was a succession of vineyards, like the country round Bordeaux. Samson had left the road along which his father and mother were walking, at a pace, perhaps, too slow for his youthful energy, and had plunged into the vineyards. Of a sudden a young lion, — a term designating a lion between the age of a cub and a full-grown lion, — brought there, perhaps, in pursuit of the foxes or jackals, which often had their holes in vineyards (Cant. ii. 15), roared against him.

Ver. 6. — *The Spirit of the Lord, &c.* — as a spirit of dauntless courage and irresistible strength of body. *Came mightily*. Hebrew, *fell upon him*, or *passed over upon him*, as in ver. 19; xv. 14; 1 Sam. x. 6, 10; xviii. 10, &c. *He rent him, &c.* He "had nothing in his hand," no weapon or knife, nor even a stick; but he rent him with as much ease as

the kid is rent. The Hebrew has *the kid*, with the definite article, which is not prefixed unless some particular kid is meant, as in Gen. xxxviii. 28. Perhaps *the kid* means the one about to be served, which the cook rends open either before or after it is cooked. Unless some such operation is alluded to, it is not easy to understand what the rending of the kid means. He told not his father, &c. This is mentioned to explain ver. 16; but it shows that Samson had wandered some distance from his parents among the vineyards (see note to ver. 5).

Ver. 7.—Went down, as in ver. 1, where see note.

Ver. 8.—He returned to take her. All the preliminaries being settled between the parents, he returned to Timnath to take his bride by the same road which he and his

parents had travelled by before, and, remembering his feat in killing the lion, very naturally turned aside to see what had become of the carcase. And, behold, there was a swarm of bees, &c. This has been objected to as improbable, because bees are very dainty, and would not approach a putrefying body. But as a considerable time had elapsed, it is very possible that either the mere skeleton was left, or that the heat of the sun had dried up the body and reduced it to the state of a mummy without decomposition, as is said to happen often in the desert of Arabia.

Ver. 9.—And . . . he went on eating, &c. Compare the account of Jonathan finding and eating the wild honey (1 Sam. xiv. 25, and following verses).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—9.—*The link of the chain.* A swarm of bees light one day in the carcase of a lion which had been killed in the vineyards of Timnathah. They construct their hive there, and make their honey. It was no doubt an unusual circumstance that the bees should form their hive in such a place rather than in a hollow tree, or the cleft of a rock, but beyond its interest as a fact in natural history nobody would have attached any importance to it. But this action of the bees was linked to curious antecedents, and to peculiar consequences. The lion had been slain by Samson, that mysterious person of gigantic strength, whose life is such a remarkable episode in the history of Israel; and Samson had been led to the spot where the lion was by his ill-regulated love for a daughter of the Philistines, who were the masters and oppressors of his country. And as to what happened after the swarming of these bees, the marriage of Samson to his Philistine bride took place after an interval just sufficient for the bees to have filled their hive with honey, and Samson on his way to the wedding, impelled by a natural curiosity to see the lion which he had killed, had turned aside from his path, and had eaten the honey which was strangely found there. It was the custom of the time and of those people to beguile the long hours of the idle wedding feasts with curious questions and strange riddles. In the gambling spirit which is such a frequent accompaniment of insufficient occupation, whether among the lazarons of Naples or the wealthy nobles of modern society, such riddles were made the occasion of wagers, and such wagers often led to deadly quarrels. In the present instance Samson's double adventure with the lion suggested to him the riddle, "Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness." Baffled in their attempts to guess the riddle by fair means, they set on Samson's wife to worm the secret out of him and divulge it to them. Samson at once perceived the treachery, broke with his wife, slew thirty Philistines, and took their spoil wherewith to pay the lost wager, and followed up the feud by successive slaughters of his enemies, thus preparing the way for the eventual overthrow of the Philistine domination. The point for our special remark is that a swarm of bees lighting on a particular spot was an important link in the chain of providence by which the destinies of a great people were guided to independence; and the observation is not only a curious one, but has an important bearing upon the difficult subject (see Homiletics, ch. iii. 12—21) of the use made of men, and of men's actions, in the providential government of the world. Samson in slaying the lion, and the bees in swarming in its carcase, did things which were links in the chain of events which God foresaw, or fore-ordained, as he did also the effects of Samson's marriage with the Philistine. But just as the bees only followed their instinct in building their hive, so Samson, in fixing his affections on the Timnathite, and in attacking the lion, and in eating the honey, and in propounding the riddle, and in avenging himself for his

wife's treachery, was merely following the bent of his own inclinations and the leading of his own will, though in so doing he was bringing about God's purpose for the deliverance of Israel. What, however, we have here to notice is the wonderful way in which God brings about his own purpose, and also the infinite foreknowledge of God. We look back, and we can trace the successive steps of causation, as one follows the other, like wave upon wave. But God looks forward from the beginning, foresees the effect of each cause in endless succession, and so orders them as to accomplish his own will. The most trivial events may be necessary links in the great chain; and while men are blindly following their own inclinations, with little thought and no knowledge of what will come of them, God is making use of them with unerring wisdom to work out his own eternal purposes, for the good of his people and for the glory of his own great name.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—4.—*Human desire overruled for Divine ends.* This incident in the life of Samson has a universal human interest. He no sooner comes to manhood than his destiny begins to determine itself. He sees a woman of the Philistines, and at once his fancy is captivated, and the strong natural desires of the young man overleap all the traditional restraints of God's people. He manufactures a law for himself; "she pleaseth me well" may mean, "it is pleasing, or right, in my own eyes." The perplexity and distress of the parents, unaware of the meaning of this strange freak, so opposed to the future they had been led to imagine for their son. Notice—

I. THE FATALITY OF DESIRE. A sudden, unreasoning, and unreasonable passion is scarcely the augury one would expect for the career of a promised deliverer. A crisis in his moral history, a pivot upon which his whole subsequent life must turn. Sexual attachments are amongst the determining factors of human character and life, and the bases of society. Yet there are no circumstances of our life so independent of mere reason, and the power of the subjects of them. Still as a rule the outward realisation of such attachments is within the control of the individual. Recognition should be made of God's share in producing them, and the matter should be laid before him. He has been blamed for "heavily loading the dice" in this matter for his own universal ends, and for wantonly subjecting the subject of passion to misery and disadvantage. Moral and intellectual progress are thus, it is said, indefinitely hindered. If it could be written, how full of light upon the moral and intellectual history of the race would be an account of the intermarriages of nations, the *mésalliances* of individuals! &c.

II. THE ENTANGLEMENT AND PERPLEXITY IT OCCASIONS. Here it meant connection with the idolatrous and sensual life of the Philistines. The relatives on both sides could not be cordial. A relaxation of moral principles must ensue. Children would bring a fresh discord. How could a man so related lift up his hand against the Philistines? An instance like this throws strong light upon the traditional objection of God's chosen people to intermarriage with neighbouring tribes and nations. It is not for nothing that it is written of Noah, and of one and another beside, "*And he was perfect in his generation.*" "The daughters of Heth" are ineligible in the eyes of the patriarch's wife for other than mere social reasons. There can be no doubt but that the same caution ought to characterise Christian parents in the alliances they encourage their children to make.

III. THE FURTHER AND HIGHER MINISTRY OF DESIRE. Behind and beyond all this sinister appearance was the Divine purpose,—"*For he (Jehovah) sought an occasion from the Philistines.*" God's will is fulfilled in many ways, and by alternatives. When sin refuses to be put under then it can be utilised; and the end more completely served, albeit not to the immediate happiness or advantage of the guilty agent. How often "by a way they knew not" have the sons of men been led by an unseen providence to gracious ends. An ill-assorted marriage is a great calamity, but it may be the determining cause of important spiritual results, and by arranging a new relationship and set of conditions, prepare for a higher and nobler, though less immediately happy, development, of inward character. Thus the whole question of the determining force of sexual desire, which has been a matter of grief and despair

to the pessimist, is capable of another interpretation. The past history of our race shows that "where sin abounded, there did grace much more abound." Let us not therefore despair before these mysterious fatalities and complications, but commit the way of ourselves and children into the hands of him "who seeth the end from the beginning," and who makes "all things work together for good" to them that love him.—M.

Vers. 5, 6.—*The lion in the way.* Very natural is this description. The wild beast in the vineyards, the weaponlessness of the hero, &c., are all in keeping with the character of the times. Local names still extant prove the former existence of lions in Palestine; the particular district was a border one between militant nations, and therefore likely to be less thoroughly brought under; and Israel as temporarily subdued had been deprived of arms. The young lover, full of his mistress, and not on the best terms with his parents, prefers to keep by himself, a little apart. All this is highly suggestive of parallel circumstances in the spiritual life: *s. g.*—

I. YOUTH IS OFTEN SUBJECTED TO GREAT AND SUDDEN TEMPTATIONS. Our streets, the social circle, sexual relations, &c., all abound with concealed perils. These threaten the destruction of the soul.

II. THESE ARE, FROM THEIR NATURE, GENERALLY ENCOUNTERED ALONE AND IN SECRET. Bulwer Lytton says somewhere, that boys learn many things at school of great value to them through life, that were never bargained for by their parents, or represented in the school-bill. The youthful sense of growing power, and assertion of independence, creates a little world of which guardians are but dimly conscious. There is, too, the inability of age to sympathise with youth; and the natural reticence concerning matters of affection, &c. Every youth is centre of a number of invisible but potent influences that may make or mar him for life; and he ought therefore to be frequently commended to the care of his heavenly Father, and to be treated with gentleness and consideration by those in authority.

III. THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD CAN RENDER TIMELY AND EFFECTUAL HELP. The phrase, "came suddenly upon him," expresses opportuneness.

The fearlessness and modesty of the spiritual hero are here strikingly illustrated.

I. IF EARTHLY AFFECTION WILL MAKE MEN BRAVE GREAT DANGERS AND INCONVENIENCES, HOW MUCH MORE OUGHT THE LOVE OF GOD!

II. WITH THE SPIRIT OF GOD NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE, AND HE MAKES ALL THINGS EASY AND SIMPLE TO THEM THAT BELIEVE.

III. HUMILITY IS THE CHARACTERISTIC OF THE SPIRITUAL HERO.—M.

Ver. 6.—*The mystery of spiritual might.* "And he had nothing in his hand." This is typical of the Christian. Christ's injunctions to the seventy. In Samson's case it was probably due to the regulation imposed by the Philistines upon a conquered people. Christians are commanded not to put their trust in earthly equipment or the arm of flesh.

I. THAT OUR CONFLICTS WITH SATAN MAY BE TRUE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES AND NOT MERELY OUTWARD TRIUMPHS.

II. THE INFLUX AND WITHDRAWAL OF THE HOLY SPIRIT LIMIT THE AUTHORITY AND SECURE THE HUMILITY OF THE AGENT. How helpless even a Samson but for the Spirit! Temptations of our own seeking may be left to our own resources. No enterprise ought to be undertaken without the aid of the Holy Spirit, and the Divine blessing. What God brings upon us he will help us to overcome.

III. THE FAITH OF THE CHRISTIAN SOLDIER AND WORKER MUST BE WHOLLY IN GOD.—M.

Vers. 8, 9.—*Recalling past deliverances.* In this case Samson is led to do so either by curiosity or the impulse of God's Spirit. He revisits the scene of the exploit, and meets with welcome but unexpected refreshment. There are various ways of recalling spiritual experiences of God's saving power in the past. Sometimes an accident (?) may bring up vividly some forgotten circumstance of Divine grace, and we are overwhelmed with the recollections that crowd upon the mind. Soldiers who have fought side by side in famous battles have their anniversaries of fellowship and

celebration. Are there no circumstances that justify these amongst Christians? It is a spiritual education and confirmation to recall circumstances and revisit scenes of God's saving mercies.

I. THE DUTY OF THANKFUL RECOLLECTION OF DIVINE INTERPOSITIONS.

II. THE SECRET AND UNSHARED COMMUNION OF THE SUBJECT OF GRACE WITH HIS SAVIOUR.

III. ITS ADVANTAGE AND BLESSING.—M.

Vers. 5, 6.—*Samson and the lion.* I. THE DANGER. 1. It came *unsought*. It is foolish for the bravest to court danger. We have only ground for meeting it bravely when we have not rashly provoked it. 2. It was *unexpected*. Had Samson expected to encounter the lion he would probably have chosen another path, or have armed himself against it. One of the worst features of the great dangers of life is that we can rarely foresee and provide against them. 3. It was when Samson was on a *pleasurable journey*. He went to seek a wife, and met a lion! The greatest trouble may spring upon us at the moment of highest elation. Earthly joy is no safeguard. 4. It was when Samson was acting in a *questionable* manner. He was seeking a wife among the Philistines. His parents disapproved of this course though their affection sought an excuse for it (ver. 3). His conduct was contrary to the law of God (Exod. xxxiv. 16). We may meet with trouble in the path of duty, but we must expect to meet with it in the way of transgression (Jonah i. 4).

II. THE TRIUMPH. 1. It was effected in the might of the *Spirit of the Lord*. Herein is the distinction between Samson and Hercules. The Jewish hero does not trust to his own muscular strength. Strong man as he is he can only do great things in God's strength. This is the redeeming feature of his character. It shows him as one, though amongst the lowest, of the heroes of faith. If Samson needed the strength of inspiration, how much more do we weaker men need to be clothed in the panoply of God's might before we can face the dangers of life! 2. The Spirit of God came upon Samson in *especial force in his greatest need*. God gives us strength according to our requirements. In our hour of weakness it seems impossible to face the future difficulty, but when this comes how wonderfully is the new strength bestowed to meet it (Deut. xxxiii. 25). We must not, however, abuse this truth and neglect natural expedients. Samson would have been wrong in going unarmed if he had expected to meet the lion. We have only a right to believe that God will help us in sudden emergencies when we are not rashly and negligently increasing the danger of them. 3. The Spirit of God helped Samson by inspiring him to an extraordinary exercise of his *natural powers*. It was to Samson the strong, a spirit of strength. God works in us through our natural faculties and helps us differently according to our various gifts. Though the might is God's, the daring, the will, the effort must be ours. God gave him strength, yet Samson slew the lion with his own hands. 4. After victory, Samson modestly concealed his triumph. It is better to be more than we seem than to seem more than we are. If the source of our victory is God's strength we have no ground for boasting.—A.

EXPOSITION.

Ver. 10.—*So his father went down.* It is not clear what is meant by this mention of his father alone; but it was probably some part of the wedding etiquette that the father should go to the bride first alone; perhaps, as Kimchi says, to give her notice of the bridegroom's approach, that she might get ready. Among the preparations may have been the selection of the thirty young men to be "the children of the bride-chamber" (Matt. ix. 15). As these were all Philistines, the inference is that they were selected by the bride, just as with us the

bride has the privilege of choosing the minister who is to officiate at the marriage.

Ver. 11.—*When they saw him, i. e.* when the father and mother and friends of the bride saw him approaching, they went to meet him with the thirty companions who had been selected. We still see a strong resemblance to the wedding arrangements referred to in Matt. ix. 15, and xxv. 1—12; only in this case they were young men instead of young women who went out to meet the bridegroom. We may observe, by the way, that the scale of the wedding

feast, as regards numbers and duration, indicates that Samson's family was one of wealth and position.

Ver. 12.—**Riddle.** The Hebrew word is the same as that which is rendered *hard questions* in 1 Kings x. 1, and *dark questions*, Numb. xii. 8, and occurs also in Ezek. xvii. 2, where the phrase is the same as here and in ver. 16, as if we should say in English, *I will riddle you a riddle*. In English, however, to *riddle*, as a verb active, means to *solve a riddle*, not, as in Hebrew, to *propound one*. The derivation of the Hebrew word and of the English is the same as regards the sense—something *intricate and twisted*. **Thirty sheets**, or rather, as in the margin, *shirts*, a linen garment worn next the skin. In Isa. iii. 23 spoken of the women's garment, "*the fine linen*," A.V., as also Prov. xxxi. 24. The word (*sadn*, Sanscrit *sindu*) means Indian linen. **Change of garments**—the outward garment of the Orientalist, which was part of the wealth of the rich and great, and was, and is to the present day, one of the most frequent presents on all state occasions (see Gen. xiv. 22; 2 Kings v. 5, 22; Isa. iii. 6, 7; Matt. vi. 19, &c.).

Ver. 15.—**On the seventh day.** There is some apparent difficulty in understanding how to reconcile this statement with what was said in ver. 14, that they could not in *three days* expound the riddle; and also with what is said in vers. 16 and 17, that Samson's wife *kept before him the seven days of the feast*. And several different readings have arisen from this difficulty: viz., in this verse, the reading of the *fourth day* for the *seventh*, and the omission of the words, *And it came to pass on the seventh day*; and, in the latter part of ver. 14, *seven days* for *three days*. But all difficulty will disappear if we bear in mind the peculiarity of Hebrew narrative noticed in note to section vers. 1—6 of ch. ii., when we come to consider ver. 16. **Entice thy husband.** Cf. ch. xvi. 5. **That he may declare unto us.** If the text is sound, they must mean to say, *declare it unto you*, that *you may declare it unto us*, i. e. declare it unto us through you. But it is simpler either to read with the Septuagint, *that he may declare unto you*, &c., or to read, *and declare unto us*, in the imperative mood. **Burn with fire.** See ch. xii. 1, and xv. 6. **Have ye called us, &c., i. e.** Did you invite us to this feast in order to impoverish us, to plunder us of our property? We shall conclude that you did so if you do not disclose to us the riddle.

Ver. 16.—**And Samson's wife, &c.** This statement does not follow ver. 15, but is a *parallel narrative* to that beginning in ver. 14, "*And they could not in three days*," &c., down to the end of ver. 15, bringing the story down to the same point of time, viz.,

the seventh day. One stream of the narrative tells us what the young men did when Samson had propounded his riddle; the other tells us what Samson's wife did. From the very first, no doubt, she had wished to be in the secret, not perhaps from treacherous motives, but from curiosity, and the natural desire to be in her husband's confidence, and she pressed her request with cajolery and petulance. The young men at the same time had tried to find out the riddle by fair means. But on the seventh day they threatened to burn her and her father unless she found out the riddle for them, and under the terror of this threat she extracted the secret from Samson and divulged it to the Philistine young men. The only difficulty is to explain why a gap of four days occurs in the account between vers. 14 and 15. The most likely thing is, that after three days' vain attempt to find out the riddle, they began to tamper with Samson's wife, offering her money, as the Philistine lords did to Delilah (ch. xvi. 5), though the narrative does not mention it; but that on the seventh day, becoming desperate, and thinking that the woman was not doing her best, they resorted to the dreadful threat of burning her.

Ver. 17.—**She lay sore upon him.** In ch. xvi. 16 the same word is rendered *pressed him*. It came to pass on the seventh day. This is the confluence of the two streams of narrative.

Ver. 18.—**The men of the city**—the same as were spoken of in ver. 11 as Samson's companions. **Before the sun went down**—just in time, therefore, to save the wager, as defined in ver. 12. This is the uncommon word for *the sun* used also in ch. viii. 13, where see note. **What is sweeter, &c.** They put their answer in a form to make it seem as if they had guessed the riddle; but Samson instantly perceived his wife's treachery, and showed that he did so by quoting the proverb of plowing with another person's heifer. They had not used their own wit to find out the riddle, but had learnt the secret at Samson's cost, through his wife. He insinuates that had they acted fairly he would have won the wager.

Ver. 19.—**The Spirit of the Lord, &c.**—as in ver. 6 and ch. xiii. 25, where see notes. The verb here, *came upon him*, is the same as in ver. 6. **Thirty men**—the number of the companions to whom he felt bound to pay the thirty changes of garment. **Ashkelon** (ch. i. 18)—one of the five Philistine cities, but the least often mentioned, owing, it is thought, to its remote situation "on the extreme edge of the shore of the Mediterranean, far down in the south." It still preserves its ancient name, and was famous in the time of the Crusaders. "Within the walls and towers now standing Richard

(Cœur de Lion) held his court." The onion called *eschalot*, or *shallot*, is named from *Eahkalon*, or *Ashkalon*. Their spell—that which was stripped from them. His anger was kindled—against the Philistines in general, and his wife in particular, so that he went back to his father's house without her.

Ver. 20.—His companion—no doubt his "best man," the "friend of the bridegroom."

The parents of the Thimnathite, having no doubt obtained Samson's dower, and supposing him to have finally broken with his treacherous wife, proceeded to give her in marriage to the Philistine young man who had been Samson's friend—perhaps the man to whom she had told the riddle. The sad end of this unhappy alliance fully justified the opposition of Samson's parents to it in ver. 8.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 10—20.—*Another view of married life.* The lessons which we drew from the married life of Manoa and his wife seem to receive a striking confirmation, by contrast, from the unhappy union of their son with the daughter of the Philistines. Here everything was against a reasonable prospect of happiness. Their religion was different, one might say opposite. Samson had been brought up in the faith of the Lord God of Israel. He was in covenant with him by circumcision. His creed was that there was one true and living God, the Lord of heaven and earth, and that all the gods of the heathen were but vain idols. His religious duty was to love the Lord his God with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, and to serve him alone. His wife did not believe in the Lord, nor love him, nor fear him, but was a worshipper of Dagon, whose temples were at Gaza (ch. xvi. 21—30) and at Ashdod (1 Sam. v. 1—5). There could therefore be no union for them in that great bond of union which is the living God. Righteousness can have no fellowship with unrighteousness, nor light with darkness, nor the believer with an infidel, nor the temple of God with idols. Then again the interests of their respective peoples were opposite. To break off the Philistine yoke from the neck of Israel; to set his people free from a shameful bondage; to rescue his native towns, and fields, and vineyards, from the usurped possession of the uncircumcised invader; to drive out the foreigner from the land which God gave to his forefathers; was Samson's natural aim, and the use which he must needs make of his supernatural strength. But his wife's sympathies were all with the children of her people. Her heart would swell with pride as she thought of their conquests over Israel, of Dagon's conquests over the people of Jehovah. She would look with scorn upon the subject race, and be proud of her kindred with the conquerors. Every movement of either people must at once put them on opposite sides. What was joy to him would be grief to her; and what made her glad would make him sorry. Their language was different, their tastes were different, their habits of thought and life were different. They had nothing in common to cement their hearts and interests together, and to bind their life into one. He was pleased with her beauty, and she was gratified by his admiration. That was all. And how long would that last? What strong temptation, what powerful motive of action, what great provocation, would those influences be able to withstand? What promise did they give of unity of sentiment, and harmony of conduct, amidst the difficulties of troublous times, and the intricacies of conflicting duties? One week in their case was sufficient to supply the answer to these questions. A betrayed husband, a deserted wife, discord, strife, bloodshed, were the fruit of seven days of this ill-assorted union. The wife married to another husband is cut off by murderous hands in the prime of her youth and beauty. The husband married to another wife is again betrayed and given up to his enemies to be mocked, and blinded, and to die. The man of splendid gifts, but irregular passions, lives a stormy life, and dies a violent death. He has no gentle, clear-sighted woman to restrain and guide him; no sympathising wife to share his sorrows, and by sharing to lighten them. He only knows what is bad in woman, because he only seeks them on the bad side. And that one week of disappointed love in an unhappy and unholy wedlock casts its shade upon a whole life which might have been a most happy and glorious one. We seem, therefore, to be taught by the ill-starred marriage of Samson with the Thimnathite, as forcibly as by the blessed union of his father and mother, what to seek and what to avoid in choosing a partner for life. The union of two souls in the love of God and in

the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ; the union of two minds in all rational and sober pursuits, whether intellectual, political, or social; the identity of interests; the community of purpose to make the most of what God has given to each for the common stock of happiness; the care of each for the other as the first human duty, and the faithfulness of each to the other in the whole series of actions, from the least to the greatest—this is the ideal of Christian wedlock to which we are led by the failures of the one as well as by the virtues of the other. It is sad to think how frequently happy married life is an idea only, and not a reality, from the entire failure on both sides to carry out the conditions upon which happiness depends. A foolish choice at first, based only upon beauty and vanity, upon wealth and position, upon whim and fancy, without consulting religion, or reason, or true affection, is followed up by independent and selfish action, by each crossing the other's wishes, by mutual neglect, by mutual reproach, by mutual violation of the spirit of the marriage contract. There follow in different cases various degrees of unhappiness and disorder according to the various measures of temper, and violence, and self-will, and disregard of solemn vows, and contempt of God's word, of the parties concerned. In one home it is the constant jarring of antagonistic wills, and unloving tempers; in another it is the coldness of distant and reproachful spirits; the constant sense of injury from unfulfilled duties; in others, the man having failed to find in his wife the kindness, the solace, the help, which he expected, seeks to indemnify himself in the flatteries and cajoleries of other women; and the wife, wounded in her pride, and hurt in her affections, looks for balm and for revenge in the attentions of the profligate, and the admiration of the licentious. In both cases true manhood and womanhood are marred and crushed, and the whole life is distorted, and like a building in ruins. Public duties in the cabinet and in the field may indeed be performed by men of gifted minds and transcendent powers, in spite of their aberrations from moral rectitude; but the delicate organisation of affections and faculties which were given to make up the charm and beauty of private and domestic life cannot live in an atmosphere of vice; and when there is a breakdown of the love and obedience due to God, there is a breakdown also of the dignity and happiness of man. The careful study by married people, in a spirit of true Christian philosophy, of what is necessary to make wedlock the blessing God intended it to be when he "made the woman and brought her unto the man," and the careful daily endeavour, in the spirit of saintly obedience, to perform each his or her part in the mutual contract, in spite of difficulties and hindrances, would be a large contribution to human happiness, and to the beauty of the Church of God.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 14.—*Samson's riddle.* A strong impression had been produced by the circumstance upon the mind of Samson. This was one of the means used by God to penetrate and awaken the moral nature of his servant. A certain Divine wisdom is given for its interpretation, and for its suitable statement to the world, the heathen of his day. The form which the circumstance assumes when declared to the Philistines is a favourite one to this day amongst Eastern and primitive peoples. It constituted a distinct portion of God's great revelation of himself to man, but for many and weighty reasons it was not a plain declaration, but the "wisdom of God in a mystery."

I. THE PHENOMENA OF THE NATURAL WORLD LINK THEMSELVES WITH, AND BECOME SYMBOLS OF, SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE. Thus the deepest things of the spiritual universe may be uttered by those who are but dimly conscious of their meaning. And no man is wholly destitute of spiritual teaching: The teachings of revelation thus become indefinitely enriched and extended.

II. TO THE AWAKENED SPIRIT OF MAN THE DIVINE MEANINGS OF LIFE AND THE WORLD ARE ALONE IMPORTANT. How vast is the relationship of the truth thus generalised! For many days will such food sustain the soul. *Trials may become the sources of spiritual consolation if overcome in God's strength. Death is the gate of Life.*

III. TO THE UNBELIEVING IS THE TRUTH OF GOD SPOKEN IN PARABLES, THAT SEEING, THEY MAY NOT PERCEIVE, AND HEARING, THEY MAY NOT UNDERSTAND. This might be called the "gospel of the Philistines." It is a mighty revelation. How near were

these heathen, if they had known it, to the wisdom and kingdom of God! So is it to-day with the preaching of the gospel to unbelievers. The moral character, and not the mere intellectual power, of men is tested in this way. What the Spirit of the Lord inspires the same Spirit can interpret. God will bestow illumination upon those who seek it. How often has God spoken through striking incidents to those who would not care to hear the preaching of his word, or to whom it has not been granted! Do not let any one hastily say, "I never heard." Do not let Christians despair of those who have not heard, and who will not hear the preaching of men. God has his own way to every heart.—M.

Vers. 15—20.—*Unlawful methods of interpreting Divine mysteries.* Samson is betrayed into revealing his riddle. It was a mean subterfuge, and the fraud is promptly avenged.

I. THERE ARE ILLEGITIMATE WAYS OF GETTING AT DIVINE TRUTH. False prophets. Unwilling prophets, as Balaam. Mercenary attempts at obtaining a peculiar knowledge, as of Simon Magus (cf. Acts viii. 9—24; xix. 13; Col. ii. 17, 18).

II. THE ESSENTIAL MEANING OF THE TRUTH CANNOT BE THUS DISCOVERED. The Philistines only learnt the historic circumstance; they were still in outer darkness as to the evangelic significance of the parable or riddle. So it is with those who "intrude into those things which they have not seen or heard, vainly puffed up in their fleshly minds." God will deliver them over to strong delusion, and the belief of a lie.

III. THIS IS FULL OF DANGER, AND WILL BE PROMPTLY AVENGED. Partly in the apparent illumination, but real ignorance, of such men; and partly in the consequences attending an incomplete or garbled gospel. Here the vengeance was both spiritual and physical. How sorry the gain that involved their fellow-countrymen in such a death!—M.

Ver. 18.—*Ploughing with another's heifer.* The saying derives itself from the occasional discovery of hidden treasure by the plough, and the superstitious belief that the homebred heifer knew where the furrow ought to be drawn, because it has been shown the way before, when the treasure was hid.

I. SO SATAN AND HIS SERVANTS BETRAY MEN THROUGH THEIR HABITUAL TEMPERAMENT OR BIAS—THE WEAKNESS PECULIAR TO THEM. The weak place in Samson was his sensuality. His enemies speedily discovered this, and were unscrupulous enough to take advantage of it.

II. SAINTS SHOULD BE DISTRUSTFUL OF UNHOLY CONFIDENCES, AND SHOULD LEAVE "NO UNGUARDED PLACE" IN THEIR SPIRITUAL CHARACTER OR RELATIONS. All habitual relations or companionships with worldly persons are dangerous. Our sin will find us out, to our confusion. Safety can alone be found in perfect consecration—putting on the whole armour of God. Relations in life which, when both parties are holy, are full of comfort and help, when they involve us in close fellowship with the wicked may be our destruction.—M.

Ver. 20.—*How confidence in wicked men is rewarded.* The world is full of such instances of misplaced trust. The fable of the viper and the husbandman. It is hard to persuade men of the utter folly of worldly friendships and alliances. Only the most severe warnings and painful consequences will suffice to disabuse the mind. At the same time that the carnal nature of God's servant draws him towards the enemies of his country and his faith, God's providential dispensations are working out an effectual divorce, and preparing Samson for deadly hostility to his quondam friends.

I. THE CONFIDENCE WE PLACE IN THE WICKED WILL CERTAINLY BETRAY US.

II. GOD SEEKS BY STERN LESSONS TO SEPARATE HIS PEOPLE FROM THE WORLD.

III. NONE ARE SO OPPOSED TO THE CHARACTERS AND PRACTICES OF THE WICKED AS THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN BETRAYED BY THEM.—M.

Ver. 14.—*Samson's riddle.* The first intention of Samson's riddle is plainly, as he shows in the interpretation, to wrap up in mystery a simple event of his own experi-

ence. But, with the Eastern instinct for imagery, Samson may well be supposed to intend also to set forth general principles which he sees illustrated in that event. The words seem to suggest the beautiful truth that things harsh and destructive may be found to contain within them sources of happiness and life.

I. SOURCES OF LIFE MAY BE FOUND IN POWERS OF DESTRUCTION. Out of the destroyer came forth food. 1. The *destroying agencies of nature* prepare the way for fresh life. Geological catastrophes renew the face of the old earth with virgin fields of fertility. The products of decay are the food of new life; the rotting leaves of autumn nourishing the blooming flowers of spring. 2. *National revolutions* sometimes introduce a better order. Out of the corruption and disintegration of the Roman empire the separate nationalities of modern Europe sprang into being. 3. *Religious destructive agencies* prepare the way for new religious institutions. The work of the Hebrew prophets, of Christ and his apostles,—especially St. Paul,—of the leaders of the Reformation, was largely destructive, and only after a certain amount of ruthless breaking up of old revered habits and doctrines was it possible to introduce the good things they were ultimately destined to establish. We may be too fearful of needful but painful destroying agencies, and by joining the new cloth to the old garment may only increase the final rent. 4. Destructive influences in *private life* are overruled by God's providence to produce fruitful issues. Our cherished hope is dashed to the ground; for the moment we are in despair. But in time out of the grave of the past God makes a purer, nobler hope to spring. 5. *The death of Christ is the source of the Christian's life.* In his broken body we see our bread of life (1 Cor. xi. 24).

II. SOURCES OF QUIET BLESSEDNESS MAY BE FOUND IN MOVEMENTS OF VIOLENT STRENGTH. Out of the strong comes forth sweetness. 1. It is only in *strength that we can find true gentleness.* While gentleness makes us great, greatness is necessary to the perfection of gentleness. Soft weakness is not gentleness. Self-control, forbearance, quiet work in the midst of difficulty are signs of gentleness, and they all imply great strength of soul. Christ's shadow shelters us because he is a great rock (Isa. xxxii. 2). 2. *Violent exercises of strength are sometimes required to remove an unsettled, restless condition of things,* to establish an equilibrium, and so secure more peace. Storms clear the air and bring about a more stable calm than that which preceded them. The troubles of life subdue our passions, rebuke our wilfulness, chasten our affections, and thus prepare us to receive the peace of God. 3. A healthy exercise of strength is the means of bringing *happiness to others.* Sentimental sympathy is of little use. If we wish to sweeten the lot of the most miserable classes of men, we must be prepared for active measures of improvement. 4. In proportion to the violence of earthly trials will be the *sweetness of the heavenly rest.*—A.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XV.

Ver. 1.—Within a while—the same expression as that in ch. xiv. 8, rendered “after a time,” and in ch. xi. 4, rendered “in process of time.” In the time of wheat harvest—about the month of May. The harvest, as appears from ver. 5, had begun, some corn being already cut, and in shocks; the rest still standing, and, being ready to be cut, of course extremely dry and inflammable. With a kid, as a present, intended no doubt to make peace (Gen. xxxviii. 17). His anger (ch. xiv. 19) had now passed away, and his love for his wife had returned. He was little prepared to find her married again to his friend.

Ver. 2.—Is not her younger sister, &c.

Samson's father-in-law might well have thought that Samson had forsaken his wife, and would never forgive her treachery. Possibly too he was a covetous man, and glad to get a second dower. Anyhow, his answer was conciliatory; but Samson was not in a mood to accept excuses, or be softened by conciliation.

Ver. 3.—I shall be more blameless than the Philistines. The phrase rather means, *I shall be blameless (or guiltless) before the Philistines*, i. e. in relation to the Philistines,—they will have nothing to lay to my charge; my revenge will be a just one,—as in Numb. xxxii. 22: *Then shall ye be guiltless before the Lord, and before Israel.* He means that so grievous an injury as he had received in having his wife taken from him and given

to a Philistine will justify any requitals on his part.

Ver. 4.—**Foxes.** The word here rendered *fox* (*shu'al*, in Persian *shagal*, which is etymologically the same word as *jackal*) includes the jackal, which is as common in Palestine as the fox. Here, and in Pa. lxiii. 10, the gregarious jackals, the *canis aureus*, are undoubtedly meant. **Caught.** The Hebrew word means especially *caught in nets or snares*. See Amos iii. 5 (have taken nothing at all); Pa. xxxv. 8 (let his net catch himself); Jer. xviii. 22; Isa. viii. 14 (*taken*), &c. And it is in this sense that the A. V. uses the word *caught*. A clever sportsman, as no doubt Samson was, would have no difficulty whatever in netting or snaring 300 jackals, which always move in packs, and would be attracted by the vineyards of Thimnathah, for which their partiality is well known (see ch. xiv. 5, note). The writer of the additional article *Fox* in Smith's 'Dictionary of the Bible,' states that he had tried the experiment of throwing grapes to the foxes, jackals, and wolves in the Zoological Gardens. The wolves would not touch them, the others ate them with avidity. **Took fire-brands, &c.** Many cavils have been directed against the truth of this account, but without the slightest reason. The terrified animals, with the burning torches and the blazing straw behind them, would necessarily run forwards. Samson would, of course, start the couples at numerous different points, and no doubt have a number of Hebrews to assist him. To the present day the corn-fields in that part of the *Shephelah* extend continuously for twenty or thirty miles.

Ver. 5.—**The sheeks and the standing corn.** See ver. 1, note. **With the vineyards and olives.** The Hebrew text has *the orchards of olive trees*—the word *cherem*, usually translated *vineyard*, meaning also any *orchard*; but the Septuagint in both codices supplies *and*, as does the A. V., which gives the more probable sense, *vineyards and olives*. It is unlikely that the vineyards should not be mentioned, in a district abounding in them.

Ver. 6.—**And the Philistines . . . burnt**

her and her father with fire. See ch. xiv. 15. It appears from Gen. xxxviii. 24; Levit. xx. 14; xxi. 9; Josh. vii. 15, 25, that burning with fire was a judicial punishment among the Hebrews. Possibly the Philistines, in their fear of Samson, and perhaps also from a rude sense of justice, inflicted this punishment upon the Thimnathite and her father as the real authors of the destruction of their corn-fields, by giving Samson so unheard-of provocation. Note the fact of the identical fate overtaking Samson's wife which she had sought to escape by base treachery (cf. John xi. 48 with what actually happened).

Ver. 7.—**And Samson said, &c.** There are two ways of understanding Samson's speech: one, with the A. V., as meaning to say that *though* the Philistines had taken his part, and repudiated all fellowship in the shameful deed of the Thimnathite and her father, yet he would have his full revenge upon them; the other, translating the participle in its more common sense of *if*, makes him say, "If this is the way you treat me, be sure I will not cease till I have had my full revenge." This is perhaps on the whole the most probable meaning. It still leaves it uncertain whether the Philistines meant to do Samson justice, or to do him an additional injury, by putting his wife and her father to death.

Ver. 8.—**He smote them hip and thigh, &c.** A proverbial expression, the origin of which is uncertain; it means, he smote them with a great and complete slaughter. It is reasonable to suppose that he had gathered a few Hebrews round him to help him. **He went down, &c.** This shows that *Etam* must have been situated lower than Timnath, and seems to preclude its identification with *Urtas*, in the hill country of Judah, between Bethlehem and Tekoah, which apparently represents the *Etam* of 2 Chron. xi. 6. But there is another Etam in the tribe of Simeon (1 Chron. iv. 32), which may possibly be the Etam of our text. **In the top of the rock.** Rather, the *cleft* or *fissure* of the rock—some narrow and inaccessible ravine. The site has not been identified.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—8.—**The progress of the feud.** In tracing the steps of any quarrel which has gone on to the bitter end, we can usually see that there were moments when reconciliation was very near, but was hindered by the hasty action of one party, and that after such failure the enmity becomes more fierce and bitter than ever. Thus in the quarrel between Samson and the Philistines. After the first burst of anger at his wife's treachery, Samson's impatient nature had cooled down, his love for his wife had revived, and he returned to her house with a present intended as a peace offering, hoping no doubt to find her penitent, and to receive a warm welcome from her. Had

it been so, his breach with the Philistines might have been healed, and his whole future career would have been changed. But this was prevented by the intemperate haste of Samson's father-in-law. Instead of waiting to see whether Samson's just anger would subside, and keeping the door of reconciliation open, he gave Samson's wife to his friend. When Samson returned in a spirit of generous forgiveness, he found the false woman on whom he threw away his love already wedded to another, and the door closed against him. His fury knew no bounds. Everything Philistine was hateful in his eyes. The former wrong was lost in the glare of the far greater wrong which succeeded it. The Philistines were made to pay dearly for the insult and injury they had done him. And then, as so often happens in embittered resentments, even the attempt to pacify him only added fuel to the flame. His wife's adultery had been a cruel blow; the punishment of that adultery by a horrible death was a still deadlier one. The burning of corn-fields had been a sufficient revenge for the one; the slaughter of the Philistines was the only expiation for the other. And so the quarrel went on from bad to worse; the enmity became more deadly, the strife more embittered. It went on through bloodshed and captivity, till Samson and his enemies perished together under the ruins of the temple of Dagon. If quarrels are to be healed, there must be patience on both sides. Neither side must credit the other with an unappeasable hatred or with an inextinguishable wrath. Hasty insults and hasty overtures of peace must alike be avoided. Time must be given for resentment to cool and for the sting of the wrong to be forgotten. Otherwise things will grow from bad to worse; the petty insult or annoyance will be succeeded by the mortal wrong, and the melancholy spectacle will follow of two human beings, who ought to love one another as children of the same heavenly Father, using all their powers and opportunities to wound each other's feelings, and to inflict injuries upon one another. But the only real remedy for enmities is to be found in the true spirit of Christian love: "Be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." In the presence of the cross enmities and hatreds are crucified. The bitterest offence given and wrong suffered will only provoke the prayer, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—3.—*Atonements of the unrighteous.* A great wrong had been done. An act of warfare against the country of Samson's wife is punished by domestic treachery and wrong. For fear of the Philistines, Samson's wife is given to another. The fear of Samson takes the place of the fear which inspired the unrighteousness. Suggested atonement does not allay the wrath of the wronged, but magnanimously he turns his wrong into an occasion of renewed hostility to the Philistines. A national calamity thus springs from a private offence.

I. GREAT WRONGS ARE COMMITTED UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF FEAR.

II. THE ATONEMENTS AND EXCUSES OF THE UNRIGHTEOUS BUT ENHANCE THEIR GUILT.

III. THE CONSEQUENCES OF EVIL ACTIONS CANNOT BE FORESEEN OR ADEQUATELY WARDED OFF BY THE OFFENDER (*vide* ver. 6).

IV. PRIVATE WRONG MAY BE PUNISHED BY NATIONAL DISASTER.—M.

Vers. 1—5.—*God's servant set free by the providences of life.* The entanglements into which Samson fell were brought upon himself. God by painful circumstances destroys these. Samson then felt that he was at liberty to carry on war against the enemies of his country.

I. GOD'S SERVANTS ARE FREQUENTLY HAMPERED BY THEIR OWN IMPRUDENCES AND FOLLIES.

II. THE PURPOSE OF THE DISCIPLINE OF LIFE IS TO REMOVE THESE ENTANGLEMENTS AND TURN THEM INTO A STRONGER INCENTIVE TOWARDS HIS SERVICE. Entanglement and re-entanglement, deliverance beyond deliverance, is the history of Samson's career.—M.

Vers. 4, 5.—*Foxes and firebrands.* This circumstance has become classic. It vividly illustrates—

I. THE INGENUITY OF INSPIRED VENGEANCE.

II. LITTLE CAUSES OF MISCHIEF AND GREAT CONSEQUENCES.

III. THE MISCHIEF GOD'S ENEMIES ENTAIL UPON THEMSELVES. It is *unexpected, overwhelming, and vital*. The year's produce, upon which the life of the people depended, was swept away at a single stroke. No one knows how to punish the rebel against his kingdom as God himself does.—M.

Vers. 6—8.—*Those who have occasioned evil punished for those who caused it.* Of this policy amongst individuals and nations the world is full.

I. WICKED MEN ARE OFTEN WISER THAN THEIR ACTIONS WOULD INDICATE. It was well to inquire, "Who hath done this?" but when the agent was discovered, they were too afraid of him to punish him, so they wreaked their vengeance upon those who could not defend themselves. Greater care is shown by men in removing occasions of evil than in curing the source of it.

II. HUMAN INJUSTICE MAY UNCONSCIOUSLY EFFECT THE ENDS OF DIVINE JUSTICE. The father-in-law and wife of Samson deserved punishment, but hardly from those through dread of whom they had done Samson wrong.

III. BY ACTING AS THEY DID THE PHILISTINES ONLY BROUGHT UPON THEMSELVES GREATER DISASTERS.

IV. ONE WRONG LEADS TO ANOTHER.—M.

Vers. 8—16.—*Requiting evil for good, and good for evil.* It was truly unhand-some conduct on the part of the men of Judah. They had received aid and service from Samson, and their enemies had been put to shame; and now, when they are threatened with consequences for harbouring him from their foes, they are ready to betray him.

I. THOSE WHO HAVE RECEIVED THE GREATEST BENEFITS OFTEN BETRAY THEIR BENEFACTORS. Wallace was betrayed by a Scotchman; Christ by Judas, and rejected by the Jews. This arises partly from failure to comprehend the work done by great men; partly from ignoble nature, that fails to attain the level of heroic action.

II. A MAGNANIMOUS MIND WILL RATHER SUFFER EVIL THAN BE THE OCCASION OF IT TO OTHERS.

III. MEN INJURE THEMSELVES WHEN THEY EVADE DUTY IN COMPROMISE. These 3000 men of Judah might have driven the Philistines before them, and delivered their land, had they been inspired by a heroic spirit. They afterwards discover that the work is done in spite of them which might have been done by them, and thus lose the credit and blessing that might have been theirs. Samson is thus completely detached from the nation he was raised up to deliver. *So Christ stands alone as the Saviour of the world.*

IV. GOD MAY OVERRULE MEN'S MISDOINGS TO THEIR ULTIMATE ADVANTAGE. Grace can extract a blessing even from sin. But atonement has been made, and the spirit purged from its mean and unholy disposition. The crucifixion of Christ, the work of men, is the means of the salvation of men.

V. EXTERNAL BONDS CANNOT EFFECTUALLY BIND THE SERVANT OF GOD.

"Stone walls do not a prison make,
Nor iron bars a cage."

Persecutions tend to further the influence of truth. God breaks the bands with which men confine his servants and his word.—M.

Vers. 4, 5.—*Ingenuity and originality.* I. INGENUITY IS OFTEN AS EFFECTIVE AS STRENGTH. Samson is not merely the hero of brute force; he shows wit, intelligence, inventiveness. We constantly see how effective these faculties are in business, in war, in politics. The Christian needs the wisdom of the serpent (Matt. x. 16). In many of our Christian enterprises the requisite for greater success is not more money, more workers, nor even more zeal, but wiser methods. Samson's ingenuity was wholly on the side of destruction. Would that the soldiers of Christ's army of salvation showed as much intelligence and wisdom in conducting the campaigns of the
JUDGES.

M

Church militant for the saving of men as the soldiers of the armies of ambitious monarchs display in their warfare, which brings little else than death and misery! Ingenuity is quickened by interest. If we had a more practical sense of the end of the Christian battle with the evil of the world, more earnest desire to effect real results, more heart in the whole work, we should be more wise and thoughtful. It is the half-hearted who are dull and sleepy soldiers of Christ.

II. ORIGINALITY OF METHOD IS OFTEN ONE GROUND OF SUCCESS. Samson showed great originality; consequently his enemies were not provided against the novel attack he made upon their land and its produce. Mere novelty is little recommendation. But we are all too much wedded to old habits of life. Novel methods in the work of the Church are sometimes advisable, (1) because the old may be effete, (2) because the old may have lost their interest or be well provided against by opponents, (3) because there is room for variety of work even when the old ways of working are successful, (4) because, though the old style may be good, we should always be seeking for improvements till we attain to perfection, and (5) because new circumstances require new treatment. We need no new gospel, no new Christ; but we do need fresh applications of the gospel, new adaptations to the wants of the times. There is room for the richest originality in those who have the most loyal attachment to the ancient truths of Christianity.—A.

EXPOSITION.

Ver. 9.—*Went up, i. e.* from their own country in the Shephelah to the hill country of Judah. As Samson had avenged his wrongs on the whole Philistine people, so they now came up to Judah to take vengeance for Samson's injuries. In *Lehi*, or, rather, *hal-Lehi*, the *Lehi*, the place afterwards so called, as related in vers. 17 and 20 (see ch. vii. 25, note). *Lehi* has been identified by some with *Tell-el-Lekhiyeh*, four miles above Beer-sheba; and by others with *Beit-Likhiyeh*, in the Wady Suleiman, two miles below the upper Beth-horon, and so within easy distance of Timnath and other places mentioned in the history of Samson. But no certainty can at present be arrived at.

Ver. 11.—*Men of Judah*. It is rather *three thousand men went down from Judah*, showing that the rock Etam was below. The top. It should be the *cleft*, as in ver. 8. *Knowest thou not, &c.* The language of these cowardly men shows how completely the Philistine yoke was fastened upon the necks of Judah. The history gives no account of the Philistine conquest, except the brief allusion in ch. x. 6, 7; but Samson's story brings to light the existence of it. The abject state to which they were reduced is shown by their complaint of Samson, "What is this that thou hast done unto us!" instead of hailing him as a deliverer. *As they did unto me, &c.* It is instructive to read Samson's defence of himself in the very words used by the Philistines in ver. 10. "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth." There is no end to rendering "evil for evil."

Vers. 12, 13.—*We are come down to bind thee*. There is something very base in this deliberate agreement with their Philistine

masters to deliver up Samson bound into their hands. But it is not very unlike the spirit in which the Hebrews looked upon Moses when he first began to work to rescue them from their Egyptian bondage (Exod. ii. 14; Acts vii. 25—28). Samson's forbearance towards his own countrymen is commendable. *Brought him up*—from the deep ravine or cleft in which he was hid. His place of concealment was probably unknown to the Philistines, or may be they had quite a superstitious fear of Samson from their experience of his prowess.

Ver. 14.—*When he came, i. e.* as soon as he was come to *Lehi*, where the Philistine camp was (ver. 9). *Shouted against him*. Rather, *shouted* as they ran out to meet him. It expresses concisely the double action of their all going out to meet him, and shouting with joy when they saw him bound and, as they thought, in their power.

Ver. 15.—A most vivid and stirring description! The Spirit of the Lord (ch. xiv. 19), with that suddenness which marks his extraordinary movements (1 Kings xviii. 12; 2 Kings ii. 16; Acts ii. 2; viii. 39, &c.), came upon Samson, and mightily strengthened him in his outer man. The strong new cords snapped asunder in an instant, and before the Philistines could recover from their terror at seeing their great enemy free, he had snatched up the heavy jawbone of an ass recently dead, and with it smote the flying Philistines till a thousand of them had fallen under his blows.

Ver. 16.—*And Samson said, &c.* The exploit gave birth to one of Samson's punning, enigmatical, sayings: "*With the jawbone of the ass, one heap, two heaps of slain.*" *'Hamôr,*

an ass, means also *an heap*. If one were to imitate the passage in English, supposing that the jaw of a sheep had been the implement, it might run something like this—*By the jaw of a sheep they fell heap upon heap*. A Latin imitation is, *Mazilla cervi, acervum acervos* (Bochart). He adds, as if in explanation, *With the jaw of an ass have I slain a thousand men*. So the women sang, *Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands* (1 Sam. xviii. 7). And a Latin song is quoted, in which Aurelian is made to say after the Sarmatic war—"Mille Sarmatas, mille Francos, Semel et semel occidimus, Mille Persas querimus" (Bp. Patrick on Judges xv.).

Ver. 17.—*Made an end of speaking, &c.* of reciting the song about the heaps of slain. It is singular that the word rendered *speaking* might also be rendered *destroying*, as in 2 Chron. xxii. 10. Called that place *Ramath-lechi*, i. e. *the height of Lechi*, or of the jawbone, or, rather, *the throwing away of the jawbone*. He commemorated the exact spot where the slaughter ceased and the weapon was thrown away by giving it the name of *Ramath-Lechi*, or, as it was called for shortness, *Lechi* (or *hal-Lechi*).

Ver. 18.—*He was sore athirst*. The incredible exertions which he had made in pursuing and slaying the Philistines put him in danger of his life from thirst. He thought he should die, and be found and abused by his uncircumcised foes. His only resource was prayer to God, who had helped him hitherto. We may note by the way that the more God gives, the more he encourages us to ask.

Ver. 19.—*But (or, and) God clave, &c.* Cf. Exod. xvii. 6; Num. xx. 8, 11. The A. V. (as the Septuagint and Vulgate seem to have done, and Luther and others) has quite misconceived the statement in the text, as if God had cloven a hollow place in the jawbone, and brought out the water

thence; whereas the statement is quite clear that *God clave the hollow place which is in Lehi* (*hal-Lehi*, ver. 9, note), and that a spring of water came out, to which Samson gave the name *En-hakkoreh*, the spring of him that called upon God, which name continued till the time of the writer. The spring apparently continued till the time of St. Jerome, and of other later writers, in the seventh, twelfth, and fourteenth centuries; but Robinson was unable to identify it with any certainty ('B. R.' ii. 64). The word translated *the (not a) hollow place* (*hammaktesh*) means *a mortar*; also the *cavity in the jaw* from which the molar teeth grow. The hollow ground from which the spring rose, with which Samson quenched his thirst, from its shape and from the connection with *hal-Lechi* (the jawbone) was called *hammaktesh*. In Zeph. i. 11 it is also a proper name, apparently of some spot near Jerusalem. The name thereof, i. e. of the fountain, with which thereof, which is in the feminine gender, agrees. Which is in *Lehi* unto this day. This punctuation does not agree with the Hebrew accents, which put a strong stop after *Lehi*. The Hebrew accents rather convey the sense that the name *En-hakkoreh* continued to be the name of the well unto the day of the writer.

Ver. 20.—*And he judged Israel, &c.* See ch. xvi. 31. It looks as if it had been the intention to close the history of Samson with these words, but that ch. xvi. was subsequently added, possibly from other sources. Compare the close of chs. xx. and xxi. of the Gospel of St. John. A possible explanation, however, of this verse being placed here is that it results from the statement in ver. 19, that Samson's spirit came again, and he revived, or came to life again, after being on the very point of death; and, adds the writer, he judged Israel after this for twenty years.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 9—20.—*Man without God, and man with God*. These 3000 men of Judah of whom we read in ver. 11 present us with a pitiable view of man's spirit crushed by misfortune, when it is not upheld by trust in Almighty God. These men of Judah were among those who did evil in the sight of the Lord, and were in consequence delivered into the hand of the Philistines. But this chastisement, instead of leading them to repent of their sin and folly in forsaking God and putting their trust in false gods, only led to a kind of sullen despair. They said in their hearts, "There is no hope: no; for I have loved strangers, and after them will I go" (Jer. ii. 25). Utterly unmindful of their high privileges and vocation as the people of God, they acquiesce in their own degradation: "The Philistines are rulers over us." They had rather not be disturbed. Let us alone, they said. Let us be as we are, fallen, sunken, degraded. All good within them was blunted and quenched. Self-respect was gone; love of country was gone; aspiration after all that is good and high was gone; courage, honour, enterprise, love of freedom, pride in their own matchless institutions, remembrance of a glorious past, hope for a glorious future, all was crushed within

them because they had no trust in God. The elevating, ennobling, sustaining feeling that they were God's chosen people, and that the unchanging love and power of God were on their side to sustain them in every virtuous effort, and give effect to every good and holy desire, was extinct within them. Their calamities and injuries, not being mixed with confidence in God, and prayer to him for deliverance, had only trodden out their manhood. It was the sorrow of the world working death. Now such a state of mind as this is a very common effect of unsanctified misfortunes. Sorrows, brought on perhaps by misconduct, which do not send men to God in penitence and prayer only harden and depress. They produce sullenness, and they destroy the spring of hope. Men sink on to a lower platform even in regard to their fellow-men. They are not humbled, only lowered. They take a lower, darker view of human life and human responsibilities. Virtue, truth, love of neighbours, kindness, generosity, and the charities of life burn very low and dim within them, if they are not wholly extinct. A cold, hard selfishness, and even that not an aspiring selfishness, wraps itself around the centre of their being. Every appeal to the higher qualities of human nature is resented or scoffed at. "Leave me alone," is the silent language of their attitude towards humanity. "Trouble me not," is their answer to every call upon them for virtuous effort. And as to the still higher and nobler calls of religion, every invitation to rise toward God, to act in the spirit of his holy word, to follow the leading of his Holy Spirit, to walk in the steps of the Lord Jesus Christ, is received with a cynical sneer; and even those who, in better days, seemed to be actuated by religious hopes and feelings, under the pressure of such unsanctified cares and sorrows fall into a thoroughly low region both of religion and of morals. Now contrast with those men of Judah the feelings and the conduct of Samson. Conscious of Divine aid, and of having unfailing strength in God, his courage never drooped in the darkest days of the Philistine oppression. Conscious of his own high calling, and of the election of Israel to be the people of God, he could not brook the notion of being ruled over by the uncircumcised, nor did he lose the hope of some great deliverance. He was ready for the service of God and of his country. And even the feeling that he stood alone did not quench his spirit. He did not lose sight of hope, because he did not lose sight of God. The weight of the great national calamity, in which he also was involved, did not utterly depress and crush him, because he believed in the mighty hand of God, which could lift up that weight in a moment, whenever it seemed good to him to do so. And so all the natural resources of his mind were kept alive and ready for action, as well as his great supernatural strength, whenever the opportunity should arise. And Samson's supernatural strength is only a type to us of that invincible spiritual strength which they have who are the faithful servants of the Lord Jesus Christ. "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me," is the truth embodied in Samson's exploits. In the Christian's steady, unwearied, resistance to evil, in his patient continuance in well doing, in the quiet, hopeful endurance of sufferings and afflictions, in the undaunted spirit which quails under no dangers, and faints under no adversities, and in the faith which eventually triumphs over all the powers of the world, we have the spiritual counterpart of Samson's great bodily strength. The brave, hopeful struggle of such, ending in victory, is in striking contrast with the desperate succumbing to evil of which we have spoken. And we may see it on a large scale in the Church herself. Often has the Church of God seemed weak and helpless before the powers of darkness, even while she had in herself the secret of an invincible strength. Often would her professed friends bind her in the fetters of worldly compliances, and hand her over to be shaped according to the fashion of this world, lest she should overthrow the accustomed sway, and break down the traditional rules. But as often has the Spirit of the Lord come mightily upon her, and she has awakened as a giant refreshed with wine, and gone forth with irresistible might. The most trivial instruments have been in her hands weapons of supernatural power; her fiercest foes have sunk before her victorious progress; God has raised up refreshments to her in her hours of need; when she called upon God for help she was helped; and many a monument of God's saving grace and helping hand has deserved to be inscribed as *En-hakkoreh*—the supply granted to the cry of faithful prayer. O Lord, let thy Spirit come upon us now, in this our day of trial; hear thy Church's prayer, and let her cry come unto thee!

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 14—16.—*Imperfect means made effectual by Divine inspiration.* It was but the jawbone of an ass, yet it slew as many as might have fallen in a battle.

I. IN THE CONFLICTS OF TRUTH IT IS OF CHIEF CONSEQUENCE THAT WE BE ON THE SIDE OF TRUTH, AND ANIMATED BY THE SPIRIT OF GOD.

II. THROUGH GOD'S BLESSING THE GRANDEST RESULTS HAVE BEEN PRODUCED BY THE RUDEST AND SIMPLEST MEANS. The preaching of the gospel by unlettered fishermen. "The solitary monk that shook the world" with the disused weapon in God's armoury. The "simple gospel" and the evils of our age.

III. NOTWITHSTANDING OUTWARD ADVANTAGES, THE ENEMIES OF GOD ARE CERTAIN IN THE END TO BE DISCOMFITED.

IV. THE ABSOLUTE NESS AND SPLENDOUR OF SPIRITUAL ACHIEVEMENTS. Pentecost; missionary triumphs; the song of Moses and of the Lamb.—M.

Vers. 17—19.—*The self-refreshment of Divine service.* After his great exploit Samson was exhausted and athirst. The zeal for the glory of Jehovah is upon him, and he cannot brook the tarnishing of his glorious victory by a base surrender to the Philistines. He immediately calls upon God, and is answered in the very scene of his warfare.

I. IN MOMENTS OF GREATEST EXALTATION AND POWER THE SAINT IS REMINDED OF HIS WEAKNESS AND DEPENDENCE UPON GOD. Paul and the "thorn in the flesh." The great deed and heroic uplifting of soul accompanying it are a Divine gift—a treasure in an earthen vessel. "By the grace of God I am what I am."

II. THE TRUE SAINT WILL FRANKLY ACKNOWLEDGE THIS, AND BETAKE HIMSELF TO PRAYER FOR DIVINE HELP. The faith that made Samson irresistible in battle now makes him prevail with God. A sense of spiritual fitness forbids the notion that God will suffer such an anti-climax. The victories that spring from acknowledged weakness are more glorious than those which proceed upon our fancied independence and self-sufficiency. "When I am weak, then am I strong."

III. THE CONDITIONS OF AN EFFECTUAL PRAYER. 1. *Sincerity and faith.* God had helped him already; he is convinced, therefore, that he will still help. 2. *Because of wants and hardships necessitated by Divine service.* He is immediately answered, and in the very scene of it. No earthly hand is suffered to help. 3. *Zeal for the glory of God.* The idea of neutralising his triumph by yielding through physical distress is obnoxious to him. He asks God to preserve the splendour of the exploit which brought such glory to his name.—M.

Ver. 15.—*The jawbone of an ass.* I. IT WAS A NOVEL WEAPON. Samson again shows his inventiveness and originality (see ver. 4). To succeed in sudden emergencies, we must have presence of mind to choose and act rapidly and freshly. The slave of routine is helpless in every critical moment of life.

II. IT WAS THE MOST CONVENIENT WEAPON AVAILABLE. If Samson could have laid his hand on a sword he would not have picked up the bone. It would be foolish, rash, and presumptuous to reject the better means in order to make a display of strength or originality in the use of inferior means. But when the only thing available is a comparatively poor expedient, it is better to use this than nothing. While we are waiting for the perfect weapons to be forged the opportunity for victory passes. Thus inferior men and inferior methods must often be used for want of better ones. It is wrong for us to refuse to do any work for Christ because we have not the best possible natural powers or cultivation. It is better to serve as we are than not at all.

III. IT WAS A SIMPLE WEAPON. Many would have despaired with such a prospect as Samson's. But difficulty is the inspiration of genius. In spiritual warfare God sometimes blesses the poorest means when faith and zeal are making the best use of them. God's strength is thus most perfect in our weakness, because then we most need it, are most likely to seek it trustfully, and will be most inclined to use it obediently.

IV. IT WAS A RIDICULOUS WEAPON. The hero would seem to be humiliated as he condescended to use such a weapon. But he was great enough to despise ridicule. It is weak and wrong to decline to use the only available means of rendering God good service because we fear they are undignified. True dignity is found not in pedantry and pomp, but in simple, brave independence. Great needs conquer foolish vanity. When the Philistines are on us we are in no mood to ask or to care whether our conduct will excite the laughter of the idle. If Christians realised more fully the awful depth of the world's sin and misery, they would be less sensitive to the trivial ridicule with which men may regard their work. How many promising lives have been poisoned by the narcotic of a false respectability!

V. IT WAS A SUCCESSFUL WEAPON. This is the one matter of consequence. Success refutes all objections. Ridicule is now turned into admiration. The very simplicity and folly of the means increases the glory of the result. So the great question in the Christian warfare against evil is that this is effective. If so, all the world's foolish criticism will be drowned in the triumph of victory.—A.

Vers. 18, 19. — *Distress after triumph.* I. ONE GREAT DELIVERANCE IS NO SECURITY AGAINST ALL FUTURE TROUBLE. Samson is surprised and vexed that a new trouble should fall upon him after his great victory. There is a danger lest we should rest contented with past triumphs. The Christian warfare can only end with the final victory over death. Till then we are in the enemy's land, and must expect that one battle will only be succeeded by another. Though we may have a season of calm, an oasis in the desert, a quiet resting-place, "*this is not our rest.*" Let us beware of the confident self-elation which often follows the conquest of a temptation; it may be an introduction to a new and more dangerous one.

II. SLIGHT EVILS MAY PROVE MORE DANGEROUS THAN GREAT ONES. Samson feels it humiliating to be in danger of dying of thirst after his victory over a much more imposing enemy; but he had means to meet the greater foe, and none with which to face the smaller one. Evils are injurious not so much in proportion to their simple magnitude as in proportion to our susceptibility to them. The force of a particular temptation depends on a man's special disposition and peculiarity of character, not simply on its inherent alarming or alluring qualities. It should humble us to learn that after escaping the greatest dangers by the help of God we may succumb to very small dangers if left to ourselves.

III. SEASONS OF TRIUMPH ARE OFTEN FOLLOWED BY SEASONS OF DEPRESSION. Samson is despondent and querulous after his victory. So was Elijah (1 Kings xix. 4). No doubt this common experience is partly the result of nervous reaction. Excitable people oscillate between the extremes of ecstasy and despair. It has also moral grounds. We grow over-confident, we expect too much, we forget that life cannot always be pitched in the heroic mood. The career of the loftiest souls is not one unbroken epic; even this has its seamy side, its stale and unprofitable moments. There is a Divine purpose of discipline in this painful experience to keep us humble and in trustful submission.

IV. GOD HELPS US IN OUR DEPRESSION AS WELL AS IN OUR ELATION. God came to the rescue of Samson. Though he murmured, God had compassion on him. God understands our weakness, and, understanding, pities it. He does not treat his servants as heroes, but as children (Ps. ciii. 13). The depression of feeling which destroys our consciousness of assurance does not destroy God's grace. It is important to observe that the faith which is the condition of God's help is not our confidence in our own salvation, but the simple trusting of ourselves to God's care, so that when we least expect his help this may come upon us and surprise us, if only we thus cast ourselves upon his mercy.—A.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XVI.

Ver. 1.—*Then.* It should be *and*. There is nothing to show when the incident occurred.

It may have been many years after his victory at hal-Lechi, towards the latter part of his twenty years' judgeship. Gaza, now *Chuzzeh*, one of the five chief cities of the Philistines,

once a strong place, but now a large open town. It was the last town in South-West Palestine on the road from Jerusalem to Egypt (Acts viii. 26, 27). It played an important part in history in all ages—in the times of the Pharaohs, the Seleucids, the Maccabees, the Romans, the Khalifa, and the Crusaders. It was within the limits of the tribe of Judah (Josh. xv. 47). It is first mentioned in Gen. x. 19, as the south-west border of the Canaanites. Its real transliteration from the Hebrew is 'Azzah, as it is actually expressed in the A. V. of Deut. ii. 23, and 1 Kings iv. 24. *Gaza* is the Greek form.

Ver. 2.—**And it was told.** These words have no doubt accidentally fallen out of the Hebrew text, but they are necessary to the sense, and are expressed in all the ancient versions. We have no clue as to the motive of Samson's visit to Gaza, whether he was meditating its conquest, or an assault upon its inhabitants, or whether he came merely in the wild spirit of adventure, or upon civil business. We only know that he came there, that, with his usual weakness, he fell into the snare of female blandishments, that the Philistines thought to have caught him and killed him, but that he escaped by his supernatural strength. Gaza is about thirteen hours' march from Thimnathah. **They compassed him in.** The Hebrew does not express this idea, nor is it what the Gazites did. It should be rendered, *They went about and lay in wait for him.* Instead of attacking him directly, they took a round-about course, and set an ambush for him in the city gates, probably in the guard-room by the side of the gate, intending when he came forth unsuspectingly in the morning, at the hour of opening the gates, to rush upon him and kill him.

Ver. 3.—**Samson arose at midnight.** Possibly the woman had learnt the plot, and gave Samson warning, after the manner of Rahab; or she may have been his betrayer, and reckoned upon retaining him till the morning; anyhow he arose at midnight, when the liers in wait were sleeping securely, and tearing up the two gate-posts, with the gates and the cross-bar attached to them, walked off with them "as far as the top of the hill that is before Hebron." **Took the doors, &c.** Rather, *laid hold of.* **For went away with them,** translate *plucked them up.* It is the technical word for plucking up the tent pins. **Bar and all,** or, *with the bar.* The bar was probably a strong iron or wooden cross-bar, which was attached to the posts by a lock, and could only be removed by one that had the key. Samson tore up the posts with the barred gates attached to them, and, putting the whole mass upon his back, walked off with it. **The hill that is before Hebron.**

Hebron "was about nine geographical, or between ten and eleven English, miles from Gaza, situated in a deep, narrow valley, with high hills on either side." It is approached from Gaza over a high ridge, from the top of which Hebron becomes visible, lying in the valley below at fifty minutes' distance. This spot would suit very well the description, "the hill that is before Hebron." Some, however, think that the hill called *el Montar*, about three-quarters of an hour from Gaza, on the road to Hebron, is here meant, and that the plain before Hebron merely means *towards*, as in Gen. xviii. 16; Deut. xxxii. 49.

Ver. 4.—**Sorek.** See ch. xiv. 5, note. The name has not yet been discovered as applied to any existing spot; but Eusebius in the 'Onomasticon' speaks of a village *Caphar-sorek* as still existing near Zorah. The term *valley (nachal)* describes a *wady*, i. e. a narrow valley with a stream.

Ver. 5.—**Lords.** See ch. iii. 3, note. **His great strength lieth**—literally, *wherein (or by what means) his strength is great.* They guessed that it was through some charm or secret amulet that his Herculean might was nourished. **Eleven hundred pieces,** or shekels, of silver. The whole sum promised by the five lords would be no less than 5500 shekels, equal to about £620 of our money. The curious notation; *eleven hundred pieces*, occurs again ch. xvii. 2. The reason of it is unknown.

Ver. 7.—**As another man**—literally, *as one of men*, i. e. of mankind, not different from other men. As regards the word rendered *withs*, it is not certain whether strings of catgut are not meant. In Ps. xi. 2 the same word is used of a bow-string. The word rendered *green* means *fresh* or *new*, and might be equally applied to catgut strings or *withs*.

Ver. 9.—**There were men lying in wait**—literally, *and the liers in wait were abiding for her in the chamber.* She had hid some three or four men in the chamber unknown to Samson, that they might be ready to fall upon him should his strength really have departed from him. The word for *liers in wait* is in the singular number, but is to be taken collectively, as in ch. xx. 33, 36—38. In ch. xx. 37 it is joined to a plural verb. It is to be presumed that through some concerted signal the liers in wait did not discover themselves.

Ver. 10.—**Wherewith,** or rather, as in ver. 8, *by what means.*

Ver. 11.—**Ropes**—literally, *twisted things*; hence *cords* or *ropes*, as Ps. ii. 3; Isa. v. 18. **Occupied**—an old obsolete phrase, for which we should now say *used*.

Ver. 12.—**Took new ropes.** She had them by her, apparently, or could easily procure them, as it is not said that the lords brought

them to her. *And there were liars.* Rather, as before, *and the liars in wait were abiding*, &c. Each time she had persuaded the lords that Samson had divulged his secret, and that she would deliver him into the hands of the men whom they sent.

Ver. 13.—*The seven locks*, by which we learn that his mass of hair as a Nazarite was arranged in seven locks or plaits. His resistance was becoming weaker, and he now approached the dangerous ground of his unshorn hair. *With the web.* This must mean the *warp*, which was already fastened in the loom, and across which Samson's locks were to be woven as the woof.

Ver. 14.—*And she fastened it with the pin.* The Septuagint and many commentators understand that she used the pin (it is the common word for a tent pin) to fasten the loom or frame to the ground, or to the wall. But a good sense comes out if we understand the phrase to mean, *So she struck with the shuttle*, i. e. she did what Samson told her to do, viz., wove his locks into the warp which was already prepared. This was done by successive strokes of the shuttle, to which the hair was fastened. *To strike with the peg or shuttle* may have been the technical phrase for throwing the shuttle with the woof into the warp; and it is a strong argument in favour of this interpretation that it makes her action the simple fulfilment of his directions. He said, "Weave my locks into the warp. So she struck with the shuttle." *With the pin of the beam, and with the web.* The Hebrew word *'ereg* cannot mean *the beam*, as it is here translated; it is the substantive of the verb *to weave* in ver. 13. Its obvious meaning, therefore, is *the woof*. The pin of the woof, therefore, is the shuttle with the woof attached to it, i. e. Samson's hair, which was firmly woven into the warp. *He went away with.* This is the same word as was applied in ver. 3 to his *plucking up* the gateposts. Now, with the strength of his neck, he tore up the shuttle which fastened his hair to the warp, and so dragged the whole solid frame along with it. However, as we do not know the technical term of the art of the weaving among the Hebrews and Philistines, nor the precise construction of their looms, some obscurity necessarily attaches to this description.

Ver. 15.—*Thy great strength lieth*—as before, ver. 6, *thy strength is great*.

Ver. 16.—*So that.* Omit *so*. The meaning is, that in consequence of her daily solicitation his soul was vexed (ch. x. 16) to death—literally, was so short, so impatient, as to be at the point to die.

Ver. 17.—*That he told her.* This begins a new sentence. Read, *And he told her. Any other man.* Rather, *like all men.* *Man*, though singular in the Hebrew, is collective as in ver. 7, and as *the lier in wait* in vers. 9 and 12, and is properly rendered *men* in English.

Ver. 18.—*He hath showed me.* So the Keri; but the written text has *her* instead of *me*, which is favoured by the tense of the verb *came up*. If *her* is the true reading, these words would be the addition of the messenger, explaining why she told them to come up once more, or of the narrator, for the same purpose. *Brought money.* It should be *the money*, the stipulated bribe (ver. 5).

Ver. 19.—*She called for a man.* It is *she called to the man*—the man whom she had secreted in the chamber before she put Samson to sleep, that he might cut off the locks. *She caused him to shave.* In the Hebrew it is *she shaved*, but it probably means that she did so by his instrumentality. *She began to afflict, or humble, him.* His strength began to wane immediately his locks began to be shorn, and it was all gone by the time his hair was all cut off.

Ver. 20.—*And shake myself*, i. e. shake off the Philistines who encompass me; but when he said so he knew not that the Lord had departed from him, and that he was indeed become weak like other men (see a fine sermon of Robert Hall's from this text).

Ver. 21.—*Put out his eyes.* One of the cruel punishments of those times (see Numb. xvi. 14; 2 Kings xxv. 7), and still, or till quite lately, practised by Oriental despots to make their rivals incapable of reigning. So King John, in Shakespeare, ordered Arthur's eyes to be put out with a hot iron (*King John*, Act IV. scene i.). Herodotus (Melp. iv. 2) says that the Scythians used to put out the eyes of all their slaves. *He did grind*—the most degrading form of labour, the punishment of slaves among the Greeks and Romans (see too Isa. xlvii. 2).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—22.—*Presumption leading to a fall.* One of the most instructive observations we can make with a view to our own guidance is that of the extreme danger of self-confidence. Humility is of the very essence of the Christian character, and the moment that presumption takes the place of humility the danger to the soul commences. Now humility is not necessarily an underrating of our own powers or our own gifts. Our powers are just what they are, and our gifts are of a certain

value, neither more nor less, and there is no reason why we should not appraise them at their true value. Samson did not overrate his strength when he submitted to be bound by the men of Judah, nor when he put the gates of Gath upon his shoulders, and carried them to the hill over against Hebron. But the transition to presumption commences as soon as we forget that we have nothing which we have not received, and begin to use what we have for our own purposes, and not for God's glory, and reckon upon its continuance, whatever use we make of it. When a gift or power generates self-conceit, as if it originated with ourselves, presumption has begun; the use of it for our own glorification is the next step; security in its continuance, however much we abuse it, is the third stage of presumption. We seem to see this in the history of Samson. He was the child of prayer, and of great expectations. From his mother's womb he was consecrated to God in the bonds of a special covenant. From his birth he had the special blessing of God resting upon him. From his youth he was moved in an extraordinary manner by the Spirit of the Lord. Before his birth he was announced as the deliverer of Israel. To enable him to fulfil his grand destiny, he was endowed with supernatural strength; and to mark how entirely that strength was God's gift, it was tied to the outward sign of his Nazarite vow, his unshorn locks. But very early he began to show a certain unfitness for his great task. His marriage with the Timnathite was a distinct downward step from the platform of heroic self-consecration to the service of God. That God designed to make use of that act in forwarding his own purposes does not in the least affect its nature as a subordination of high spiritual resolves to self-will and carnal lusts. Again, in his assaults upon the Philistines we see much more of a wayward resentment of personal injuries than of enlightened patriotic efforts to deliver his country from a degrading foreign yoke. His wife betrays his secret, so the Philistines of Ashkelon are slaughtered and plundered; his wife is given to another man by her father, so the whole country is wasted with fire to avenge the wrong; she is put to death, and he avenges her death by a great slaughter of her countrymen. His visit to Gaza, and the extraordinary feat of carrying away the gates upon his shoulders, savoured more of the wanton display of great powers for self-glorification than of a sanctified use of them for God's glory. But it is in the painful transaction with Delilah that we chiefly see that presumptuous abuse of great gifts which precedes a great fall. Unwarned by the previous treachery of Philistine women, unmindful of previous deliverances from imminent peril by the mercy of God, he gave himself up to the wantonness of self-confidence. Either not seeing or despising her designs for his destruction, he went on step by step toward his ruin, as an ox goeth to the slaughter; he tampered with his solemn vow as a Nazarite, which hitherto he had respected, and placed it at the mercy of a heathen harlot, and never woke from his delusion and presumption till he found himself a helpless captive in the hands of his enemies, deprived of his eyesight and of his liberty, an object of scorn, and, still worse, an occasion of blasphemy against God. The lesson is a striking one in every way, and it is one much needed; for nothing is more common, or more fruitful in falls and failures, than a selfish misuse of God's gifts, and a presumptuous confidence in the possession of them. We see it in men like Napoleon Buonaparte. A giant in abilities, but those abilities were used only for self-exaltation. Success led him on to blind self-confidence. He thought his power was his own, and could never be taken from him. He fell at last into the wantonness and fatuity of presumption, acting with incredible folly, and bringing upon himself an utter ruin. But we see the same thing with regard to spiritual gifts. The possession of spiritual discernment, or of eloquence in expounding the word of God, or of influence over men, begets conceit. The sense of having only what God has given us, and of being tenants at will of his mercies, becomes weakened, and spiritual pride is permitted to grow. Then men begin to use their gifts unfaithfully, *i. e.* not with a single eye to the glory of God and the good of men's souls, but for themselves. They use them and display them to feed their own vanity, to increase their own consequence and importance. They use them to gather parties around themselves of which they may be the heads and leaders. Sometimes they use them for gain, for filthy lucre, seeking the advancement of their own worldly interests, while they are ostensibly working for God. Every kind and degree of such a spirit needs

to be carefully guarded against and nipped in the very bud. That simplicity of aim and purpose which was so sublimely apparent in the words and works of the Lord Jesus should be the mark which his disciples should constantly strive to attain. The work which is done partly for a man's self is only half done. The work which is done entirely for God is done wholly. The thorough practical feeling that all our gifts and powers, be they great or small, are given to us by God for his service is a great help towards such pure and righteous use of them. But we must not forget that there is a further stage of this abuse of spiritual gifts which can only end in a grievous fall. God is very patient and long-suffering, and puts up, maybe, with our lesser offences in this respect, only gently rebuking us, and giving us significant warnings of our danger. But if these warnings are neglected, the state of presumption may grow till there is no remedy. In this state of mind men rush into temptation as if there could be no danger for them. They repudiate or neglect prayer, as if prayer was not needful for them. They lose all the marks of a gracious soul, and yet they are not frightened at their absence. And then comes a fall, maybe into the gross darkness of unbelief, maybe into the abyss of sensual sin, which to the world seems sudden, but which had really been steadily advancing through the successive stages of presumption and self-confidence. The Spirit of the Lord departs from them, and Satan enters into them. *Gifts without grace unprofitable.* But we cannot dismiss the sad history of Samson without the reflection that gifts, however splendid, and powers, however eminent, are useless without the grace to use them aright. What might not Samson have effected for his country and his generation if his extraordinary strength had been used humbly, wisely, and consistently in the service of God and for the good of Israel! If his own passions of lust, and anger, and revenge had been under the control of that Holy Spirit which so wondrously strengthened his body, and his single aim had been to walk with God and do good to man, what a career his would have been! But as it was all went to waste. Desultory actions leading to no lasting result, mighty efforts followed by shameful weakness, and heroic courage defeated by his own imbecility of purpose, made a life all marred and blotted, aimless and purposeless—a brilliant disappointment, a splendid failure, a glorious shame. But it has left this further lesson to be weighed and pondered by us all, and especially by those who are most richly endowed with intellectual or spiritual gifts, that while God can accomplish his own designs through our abuse as well as our use of his good gifts, and through our failures as well as through our successes, it rests with ourselves to improve each talent committed to us, and so to use them that they may be found unto our own honour and praise and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—3.—*God redeeming the error of his servant.* The visit to the "harlot" is not to be explained away. The character of Samson explains its nature. This was the side where he was weak, the love of women. His sensuality betrays him into a great danger. God shows his affection for his servant, and for Israel whom he had delivered, by granting strength for a signal and unexpected escape, which was marked by trophies covering his enemies with shame.

I. WE OUGHT TO BEWARE OF A ONE-SIDED MORALITY. External morality, like Samson the Nazarite's, is almost certain to be of this kind. The saint should leave no unguarded place. Only the indwelling of the Holy Ghost can deliver from besetting sins. The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth from *all* sin.

II. A SINGLE SIN MAY UNDO THE FAME AND SUCCESS OF A LIFETIME.

III. WHEN SAINTS FALL INTO SIN THE WICKED TRIUMPH AND ARE CONFIDENT OF THEIR RUIN. The conception which the world has of sainthood is one of perfect external blamelessness, the least infraction of which is hailed as utter failure. When one failing like this is discovered, many more are imagined. How sure are these cowards of the capture of their foe! Or do they only seem to be so, using words of confidence and procrastination to conceal their inward fear? Is there not an unsounded mystery, &c., that cannot be calculated upon, in the defections of God's people? What and if Peter be restored again? The awaking of him whom God

rouses from fleshly slumbers will ever take the wicked by surprise. The evil is that the Church too often shares the world's view about the irrecoverableness of backsliders. How often have God's saints been able to shout, "Rejoice not over me, O mine enemy!"

IV. THE GRACE OF GOD SOMETIMES DELIVERS HIS SERVANTS FROM THE CONSEQUENCES OF THEIR OWN FOLLY AND SIN. Sometimes, but not always. Frequently enough for hope, but not for presumption. But the victory will be wholly his own. The trophy of deliverance will reflect no credit upon the delivered one. He would rather deliver us from our sin itself. He has promised that he will heal our backslidings.

V. THE TEMPORARY TRIUMPHS OF SIN ARE SWALLOWED UP IN THE ETERNAL REDEMPTIONS OF GOD. The gates of Gaza, the chief city of Philistia, are lifted off and carried to the top of the hill beside Hebron, the chief city of Judah. Every Israelite could see them in their exalted place of exhibition. So shall it be with the victories of the Lamb. He in whom was no sin, but who was made sin for us, shall deliver from all sin, and make us "more than conquerors." The seed of Abraham was to "possess the gate of its enemies" (Gen. xxii. 17; cf. xxiv. 60). The gates of hell shall not prevail against the kingdom of Christ.—M.

Vers. 4—21.—*Samson's betrayal and fall.* The long-suffering of God, which the saints are exhorted (2 Pet. iii. 15) to account salvation, is in Samson's case presumed upon, and the besetting sin at last finds him out. The sin is single, but it is not the first of its kind, nor is it isolated. The years of self-indulgence were preparing for this—a mad revel of voluptuousness and a deliberate denial of Jehovah. The scenes of this tragedy have a typical interest, and they are sketched lightly but indelibly by a master hand. In the gradual but deliberate breaking of his vow we have a parallel to Peter's threefold denial of his Lord.

I. SENSUALITY LULLS THE SOUL INTO A FATAL SLUMBER, AND DESTROYS ITS SENSE OF DUTY AND ITS CAPACITY FOR USEFULNESS.

II. COMPANIONS IN GUILT MAY DO US MORE HARM THAN OUR WORST ENEMIES. Here the serviceableness of Delilah is at once perceived by her fellow-countrymen, and they hasten to make use of her. The bribe offered, not necessarily ever paid, not only shows the importance of Samson in their eyes, but the value they set upon the influence of this lustful woman. How much mischief can a single transgressor do, not only directly, but through influence! Here it was not only a man betrayed to his enemies, but a soul undone. "What shall a man give," &c. "He knoweth not that the dead are there, and that her guests are in the depths of hell" (Prov. ix. 13—18). The harlot's house, and what it introduces to.

III. THE UNGODLY MISAPPREHEND THE SECRET AND NATURE OF SPIRITUAL STRENGTH. The Philistines evidently thought Samson's power lay in the efficacy of some charm. It is this they seek to obtain. They are incapable of thinking of a higher influence. Samson accordingly plays with this superstitious fancy, giving at the same time in each of his answers a parabolic or riddle-like shadowing forth of the true secret. So Satan and his servants tempt the Christian by altering the outward circumstances of life, associations, habits, &c., through which the life works, but of which it is independent. Until the saint yields it up, the secret of his life with God is safe.

IV. EVEN IN THE MOMENT AND CRISIS OF SPIRITUAL DOWNFALL THERE ARE DIVINE INTERPOSITIONS, RETARDATIONS, AND OCCASIONS FOR REPENTANCE. The Spirit of God was evidently working through the mind of Samson, and suggesting the evasive riddles, parables, &c., that "seeing they might not see," &c. The question of his downfall is thereby brought several times before himself ere it actually takes place. So Peter and the cock-crow. In how many lives is this providential method illustrated! Temptation is played with until, constrictor-like, it springs upon its prey. Recollections of childhood's lessons, early scenes, &c. are very potent at such times.

V. WHEN THE SAINT'S VOW TO GOD IS BROKEN, ALL IS LOST. The secret is out, and the charmed life is helpless. A wreck of a man. Nothing left but the memory of an irreparable past and the burden of self-wrought helplessness. There are no ruins so pitiful as those of men who once were saints and Christian workers, Sunday-

school teachers, ministers, &c. How dark is the world and life when the soul's light has gone out! *With* God the weakest is strong, *without* him the strongest is weak. "His eyes, blinded by sensuality, saw not the treason; soon, blinded by the enemy, he should see neither sun, nor men, but only God. That done, he turned back, and God came back to him" (Lange).—M.

Ver. 20.—"*And he wist not that the Lord (Jehovah) was departed from him.*" A common state with many in Christ's Church. They are useless, helpless, and miserable, and they do not realise its significance. They try the customary methods, duties, &c., but fail to produce the looked-for results. They "go out as at other times before," but still is the spirit bound. Hitherto the Philistines knew not the secret of his strength, now he does not realise the secret of his weakness.

I. SPIRITUAL IGNORANCE RESULTS FROM SPIRITUAL DOWNFALL. This is a partial converse of "he that doeth the word shall know of the doctrine." A mark of those in whom the truth is not, is that they deceive themselves; they fancy they are still the same as formerly. How subtle yet infinite is this distinction—with God, without God!

II. THE LOSS SUSTAINED BY THE FALLEN SOUL IS GREATER THAN IT REALISES. Only gradually does the experience work itself out, in a Judas's remorse or a Peter's repentance. Samson thought his strength merely had gone—it was *God*, the Giver of his strength. "Whoever has God knows it; whomsoever he has left knows it not" (Lange).—M.

Vers. 15—17.—*Samson's weakness.* Samson's weakness is twofold. Through lack of moral strength he reveals the secret of his physical strength, and is thus betrayed into the loss of this also.

I. SAMSON'S MORAL WEAKNESS. This is the man's great failing, apparent throughout his history, but reaching a climax in the present incident. Physical endowments are no guarantees for spiritual graces. Must not some of our young athletic barbarians of the aristocracy, adored by the multitude for chest and muscle, be condemned by true standards of judgment for contemptible weakness of character? Such weakness is far more deplorable than the bodily weakness of palsy and paralysis. St. Paul was considered miserably deficient in physical power and presence (2 Cor. x. 10), yet his strength of soul exalts the apostle immeasurably above Samson. The moral weakness of Samson is illustrated by the circumstances of his great defeat.

1. *Sin.* Samson was neglecting his duty and degrading himself with those evil communications which corrupt good manners. There is nothing so enervating as the conscious pursuit of a guilty course.
2. *Pleasure.* Instead of toiling, fighting, and sacrificing himself for his country, Samson was wasting his hours in pleasure. Apart from the wrongness of this conduct, the lax, self-indulgent spirit it engendered was weakening. In seasons of pleasure we are off our guard.
3. *The allurements of false affection.* Samson can resist a host of Philistine warriors, but he cannot resist one Philistine woman. Strong against rude violence, he is weak before soft persuasion. Pure love is the loftiest inspiration for self-sacrificing devotion; but love degraded and corrupted is the deadliest poison to purity of character and vigour and independence of action. How many saints and heroes have found their humiliation in the same snares which caught the strong Samson and the famous St. Antony!
4. *The self-confidence of strength.* Samson plays with the curiosity of Delilah, sure of the power which will come to his aid in the moment of danger, till by degrees he is persuaded to betray the secret of that very power. Had he been less strong, he would have been less rash. Presumption is more dangerous than conscious weakness (1 Cor. x. 12).

II. SAMSON'S PHYSICAL WEAKNESS. This resulted from his moral weakness. In the end the faults of the inner life will bear fruit in trouble to the outer life.

1. Samson's strength was a *Divine gift*. He had not attained it by self-discipline nor merited it by service. It was a talent intrusted to his care to be used for God. What God gives God can withhold.
2. Samson's strength was derived from *spiritual sources*. Samson was not a mere prodigy of brute force. He was one of God's heroes, and the glory of his strength lay in this fact, that it was the outcome of an

inspiration. The most exalted powers we have for earthly work are derived from spiritual sources. If these sources are cut off, the energies which issue from them will be exhausted. Samson grows weak through the departure of the Spirit of the Lord. 3. Samson's strength depended on his *observance of the Nazarite's vow*. When the vow was broken the strength fled. God has a covenant with his people. He is always true to his side, but if we fail on ours the covenant is void and the blessings dependent on it cease. (1) The vow of the Nazarite implied consecration to God. God bestows graces on us so long as we live to him, but our departure from him necessitates the just withholding of those graces. (2) The vow required obedience to certain regulations. These were trivial in themselves; but the obligation of obedience is determined not by the importance of the commands given, but by the authority of the person giving them. Disobedience is shown not to the law, but to the authority. A small test may be sufficient to reveal this. Disobedience to God is the fundamental element of all sin, and, as in Samson's case, it will be the sure cause of our ruin.—A.

Ver. 20.—*God's departure from the soul unrecognised.* "He wist not that the Lord was departed from him."

I. THE FACT. 1. There are men whom *God has forsaken*. No man is utterly forsaken by God; our continued existence is an evidence of the continued presence of him in whom we live and move and have our being. But the fuller presence of God, that which secures strength and blessing, may depart. 2. His departure is the *greatest curse* which can fall upon a man. The consequences of it are weakness, shame, ruin. The conscious realisation of it is hell. 3. The cause of this departure of God is in *the conduct of men*, not in the will of God. Samson forsook God before God forsook him. God does not visit his people casually, and only for seasons; he abides, and will never leave them (Isa. xli. 17) till they wilfully depart from him. 4. A *past enjoyment* of God's presence is no guarantee against his future departure. God is not only absent from those who never knew him, he departs from some in whose hearts he has once dwelt. If the Christian has left his first love, he will find that all his previous experience of God's blessings will not secure him against the dreary night of a godless life.

II. THE IGNORANCE OF THE FACT. Samson was unconscious of the fearful loss he had sustained. So there are men who retain their honoured position in Christian society and in the Church while, even unknown to themselves, the source of the life which gave it them is ebbing away. The causes of this ignorance should be traced. 1. The presence of God is *spiritual*, inward, silent, secret, and his departure makes no outward sign. 2. *Old habits* continue for a season after the impetus behind them has ceased, as the train runs for a while after the steam has been shut off. 3. God may leave us *gradually* as we forsake him by degrees. The fall is not sudden and violent, rather it is a quiet gliding back; and the loss of Divine grace is not often (as in the case of Samson) sudden, but little by little it leaves us. 4. One of the worst effects of God's departure is that it leaves us in a state of *spiritual indifference*. As with the death which follows extreme cold, the very fatality lies in the fact that the more dangerous our condition is, the more numbed are our faculties to any feeling of distress. The man from whom God has departed has neither the keenness of conscience to discern the fact, nor the feeling of concern to take any notice of it. 5. The tests of God's absence are not always *immediately applied*. The rotten tree stands till the storm strikes it; the corpse mocks sleep till corruption ensues; Samson does not know of God's departure till the Philistines are on him. But though postponed for a season, the revelation must come in the end. How much better to discover the evil first by self-examination! (2 Cor. xiii. 5).—A.

EXPOSITION.

Ver. 23.—*Gathered them, &c. themselves. To rejoice.* The Hebrew is *for a festivity, or merry-making, or feast*. There was to be a great feast upon the sacrifices offered to

Dagon their God. *Dagon* (from *dag*, a fish in Hebrew), the national male god of the Philistines, as *Atergatis*, or *Dereto*, was their goddess. Both the male and female

divinities seem to have had the head and breast and hands human, and the rest of the body fish-shaped (see 1 Sam. v. 5). The fish was a natural emblem of fertility and productiveness, especially to a maritime people. The fish-shaped idol is found upon old Phœnician coins, and also on the monuments of Khorsabad, and on some Assyrian gems in the British Museum. One of the chief temples of Dagon was at Gaza. Several towns bore the name of Dagon, as *Beth-dagon* in Judah (Josh. xv. 41) and in Asher (Josh. xix. 27), *Caphtar-dagon* near Diospolis, &c., showing that the worship of Dagon was widespread.

Ver. 24.—**And when the people, &c.** The *people*, as distinguished from the *lords* in the preceding verse, to show how universally the capture of Samson was ascribed to Dagon. Rulers and people alike praised Dagon. **Saw him.** Not on the occasion of his being brought into the temple as mentioned in ver. 25, but after his capture, and whenever they saw him grinding or elsewhere. It was this universal ascription of praise to Dagon that led to the celebration of this great feast. This praise of Dagon is also dwelt upon to show that God, in what happened, vindicated the glory of his own great name, which was blasphemed by the servants of Dagon when they thus made him superior to Jehovah. So Milton makes Samson say, "All the contest is now 'Twixt God and Dagon. . . . He, be sure, will not connive or linger, thus provoked, but will arise, and his great name assert." Generally, the 'Samson Agonistes' is an excellent commentary on the history of Samson.

Ver. 25.—**When their hearts were merry.** They would not have acted so imprudently as to bring Samson out of his prison had not their judgment been clouded with drink. **That he may make us sport. And he made them sport.** The two verbs are not the same in Hebrew, but they have much the same meaning. It is not certain whether the idea conveyed is that of the A. V., that Samson was brought there to be as it were baited by the populace, jeered and jested at, reviled and reproached, perhaps struck or pelted; or whether the words do not simply mean *to dance with music*, which is certainly the meaning of the latter verb (*he made sport before them*, A. V. and margin) in 1 Sam. xviii. 7 (*played*, A. V.; see ver. 6); 2 Sam. vi. 5, 21; 1 Chron. xiii. 8; xv. 29. **They set him between the pillars, i. e.** when he had done dancing; because he must have been dancing outside the house for the people on the roof to see him.

Ver. 26.—**Suffer me, or it may be rendered, Let me rest.** He pretended to be tired, and asked to be allowed to rest a few minutes and lean against the pillars. **That I may**

feel, or, literally, and make me feel. He adds his motive for making the request—**that I may lean upon them—to rest himself after the severe exercise of dancing.**

Ver. 27.—**Now the house was full, &c.** We do not know what was the construction of Philistine temples or houses of amusement; but from the description here given it seems that the interior was ranged like an amphitheatre, with seats for the lords and principal people, and with an open front, so as to command a view of the stage just outside, and that front supported by pillars on which the beams of the roof, both the transverse beam and the longitudinal ones running into it, rested. The roof itself was flat, and had the weight of 3000 people upon it, throwing a great strain upon the beams which rested upon the pillars. The sudden removal of the pillars would bring the roof down at that end, crowded as it was with the people, and would inevitably drag the whole mass in the same direction one over another, while the swaying of the people would bring the whole roof down upon the heads of those beneath, who would be crushed by the heavy timbers and stones and bodies of men falling upon them.

Ver. 28.—**And Samson called unto the Lord.** This is the first mention we have of Samson praying since the memorable occasion when he gave the fountain the name of *En-hakkoreh* (ch. xv. 19, note). Perhaps we may see in this an evidence that his affliction and shame had not been without their effect in bringing him back to God humbled and penitent. The language is very earnest. "O Lord, Jehovah, remember me, . . . strengthen me only this once, O God!" The threefold name by which he addresses the Almighty implies great tension of spirit. **That I may be at once avenged.** Meaning *at one stroke*—he would take one vengeance so terrible that it would be sufficient for his two eyes, which makes very good sense if the Hebrew will bear it. The literal translation would be, *that I may be avenged with a vengeance of one stroke*. Others take it, *that I may be avenged with a vengeance for one of my two eyes*, which it is not easy to understand the meaning of.

Ver. 29.—**The two middle pillars.** There may have been, say, four pillars in the front; the two middle ones standing near together, and the other two nearer the sides.

Ver. 30.—**Let me die, or, my life shall perish with the Philistines.** He knew it was certain death to himself, but he did not shrink from it. His last act should be to destroy the oppressors of his country. **So the dead which he slew, &c.** The words sound like the snatch of some song or proverb in which Samson's death was described.

Ver. 31.—**His brethren, &c.** Some infer

from this that Samson's mother bare other children after the birth of Samson. But the Hebrew use of the word *brethren* is so wide, applied to cousins, or members of the same house of fathers, or of the same tribe, that it is by no means a certain inference. Here *his brethren* might mean the Danites generally, and *all the house of his father* those who were more nearly related, as belonging to the house of his father. His father was probably dead, and indeed the mention of his father's *burying-place*, or rather *sepulchre*, makes it certain that he was, so that Milton was in error in making him alive. *Zorah and Eshtaol*. See above, ch. xiii. 2, 25, note. *And he judged Israel*. See ch. xv. 20. The parallel between Samson and Hercules is in many respects very remarkable, and has been drawn out by Serdrius and others. The supernatural strength of each, the slavery to women ("Quem non mille fer, quem non Sthenelius hostis, Non potuit Mavors vincere, vicit amor." Ovid), the tearing asunder of the lion, the violent death of each, partly voluntary and partly forced, are all points of strong general resemblance. But one of the most remarkable is the connection of Hercules with two pillars. The "pillars of Hercules" on each side the straits of Gibraltar, Mount Abila and Mount Calpe, were said to have been rent asunder by the strength of Hercules' arms. And Herodotus relates that in

the temple of Hercules at Tyre were two remarkable pillars, one of refined gold, the other of smaragdus, some green stone like an emerald (ii. 44). But the account given of a visit of Hercules to Egypt is still more remarkable, as compared with the history of the binding of Samson and the slaughter of the Philistines, as related in ch. xv. The following are the words of Herodotus:—"The Greeks say that when Hercules went down to Egypt, the Egyptians surrounded him, and led him in a procession to sacrifice him to Jupiter; that he kept quite still for a time, but that when they were commencing the sacrifice at the altar" (the first act of which was cutting off the hair) "he turned in self-defence, and by his prowess slew them all." On which Herodotus remarks, "How was it possible for him, being but one, and being only a man, to slay many myriads?" The prevalence of the worship of Hercules among the Phœnicians, as, e. g., at Tyre and Thasos, a Phœnician colony, and the close connection of Egypt with Gaza, where the prowess of Samson was so well known, are points not to be omitted in considering the probability of some of the legends of Hercules being drawn from the history of Samson. So also is the title of the Phœnician Hercules, the saviour or deliverer, as compared with ch. ii. 16, 18; xiii. 5.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 23—31.—*The short-lived triumph*. One of the severest trials to which the faith of the people of God is exposed, is that triumph of evil over good, and of the enemies of Christ over his Church, which from time to time is permitted by God, and which in truth is one of the features of this disjointed age. The most signal and most awful triumph of the powers of darkness over the kingdom of light was when the only-begotten Son of God, Jesus our Lord, in the midst of his life of perfect goodness, and his service of perfect obedience to the will of his Father, was betrayed into the hands of sinners, and given up to suffer death upon the cross. When he lung in shame upon the cross, helpless and forsaken; when he bowed his head and gave up the ghost; when he was laid in the silent tomb, and the light of the righteous One was quenched in the darkness of the grave, then indeed the triumph of sin was at its height, and the hope of the servants of God was brought very low. But when on the third day the doors of that grave were burst open, and the prisoner of hope came forth in the power of an endless life, and he that was crucified ascended up to heaven, and sat down on the right hand of the majesty on high, from thenceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool, that brief triumph of the powers of darkness was turned into the far greater triumph of the kingdom of light; the enemies of Christ were put to shame, the servants of Christ were enabled to rejoice, and the joyful hope was exceedingly revived and established, that in due time there will be a final deliverance from evil, and that the kingdom is God's, and the power and the glory for ever. In the light of the resurrection the Church looks forward with unmoved confidence to the time when the Son of man shall come in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory, and shall take to himself his everlasting kingdom of righteousness, and reign with his ancients gloriously. But meanwhile the Church must expect many short-lived triumphs of evil over good, and of darkness over light.

There will be many occasions on which the world will say, Let us rejoice, for our god hath delivered our enemy into our hand. We may expect that many an isolated affair, or even a connected chain of events, will take that turn that the servants of Christ will be put to shame, and ungodliness and irreligion will seem to have it all their own way. It may even come to pass that the champions of the gospel shall seem fit only to make sport for an unbelieving and self-sufficient age. Nor is it the least part of the trial that some of these discomfitures are brought on by the errors and failures of the servants of God. The presumption and self-confidence, the blindness and moral weakness, of some like Samson; the intemperate, fiery spirit of others like the Boanerges; the fear of man in others like Peter, and so on, provoke defeat by putting religion in a false light in the eyes of those who are always looking out for occasions to bring it into contempt. But in the midst of these trials of faith, whether they take the form of private discouragements, or of public checks to the progress of religion, and public triumphs of the spirit of ungodliness, it is the Church's unfailing comfort to know that the triumphs of evil are short-lived, and the triumph of truth is eternal. *Magna est veritas et prævalet.* We should never forget for one moment that behind the passing cloud there is shining the unchanging sun. The faith and patience of the saints are indeed required, sometimes more, sometimes less, but are always required in this present age. The depression of the truth, the insolent aggressions of the various forms of evil, the discomfiture for a time of the champions of the cause of Christ, and the temporary victories of Antichrist, are very painful episodes in the history of the world and of the Church. But the pages of Holy Scripture, and even the pages of the experience of centuries, continually testify that the triumphs of falsehood and evil are but for a moment, the victory of truth and righteousness will be for ever.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 21—31.—*A hero's exodus.* The blind captive, led by a boy, and degraded to the office of a buffoon in the idolatrous services of the Philistines, is a sad spectacle. But inwardly he was nobler than when carrying the gates of Gaza. His soul's eye has opened, and he repents. The locks that had been shorn grow again, and with them, gradually and, apparently, unconsciously, his strength returns. The Divinely-offered opportunity. The last act an atonement.

I. GOD OFTEN SUFFERS HIS ENEMIES TO OVERLEAP THEMSELVES. Here they are exultant. They rejoice as over a foe utterly vanquished. They do not know that their festival, blasphemy against God, is to be the occasion of their destruction. "The green bay tree" may be nearer to the axe than insignificant fruit tree.

II. THERE IS AN "UNKNOWN QUANTITY," NOT TO BE CALCULATED UPON, IN THE REPENTANCE OF THE BACKSLIDER. Even the ruin of a believer may be the temple of the Holy Ghost. A short time with God's blessing may suffice to retrieve the errors of a lifetime. "Faith as a grain of mustard seed" can "remove mountains." How often has Satan been disappointed of his prey! Some of the greatest of God's servants have been won back from backsliding. Let the wicked beware then of their companion and laughing-stock, and let the believing Church work on; the poor useless wreck over which we despairingly weep may yet become a man again, a blessing and a comfort to many souls.

III. THE PRAYER OF REPENTANCE AND FAITH MAY RETRIEVE A SOUL'S RUIN. Can God give ear to this heart-touching cry, and shall he not listen to his captive children in the dungeons of sinful habit or the temples of superstition? "This once," "only this once." One prayer, one look at the Crucified, one grand effort in God's strength, how much it may do!

IV. EVEN THE WEAK ONES OF GOD ARE MIGHTIER THAN THE GREAT ONES OF THE WORLD.—M.

Vers. 28—30.—*Samson's heroic death.* The death of Samson was more honourable to the man and more useful to his nation than any event in his previous career. The heroism of his death followed the return of God's strength.

I. THE RETURN OF STRENGTH. 1. It followed a *great fall.* We may learn lessons

from our own failures. Through our very weakness we may discern the secret of strength. The humility which should accompany failure is one of the first steps towards wiser conduct. 2. It came in a season of *distress*. Samson was a prisoner, defeated, insulted, mutilated. Sorrow is one road to God's grace, (1) as it teaches us the folly of the evil conduct that produced it, (2) as it leads us into a mood of serious and heart-searching reflection in which true wisdom is found, and (3) as it teaches us our helplessness, and compels us to turn to God for deliverance. 3. The return of strength followed a *return to obedience*. This was suggested by the growing of Samson's hair and the return to fidelity to his vow. It was gradual. We are received into God's favour immediately we return in penitent faith; but we only conquer evil consequences of sin and regain lost powers and position by degrees. 4. The return of strength was realised through *prayer*. Samson now knows his weakness. In his own soul he is weak. Strength must come from above. There is no prayer which God will more certainly hear than that which invokes his aid in our performance of some great self-sacrificing duty.

II. THE HEROIC DEATH. 1. Samson uses his new strength for the *deliverance of his nation*. It is not given him merely for the amusement of the Philistines. If God gives us any special powers, he does so for some high purpose. We must not waste these in idle amusements, but put them to practical service. 2. Samson can only accomplish the greatest feat of his life by means that *bring death to himself*. (1) This was partly a result of his sinful weakness, which had betrayed him into the hands of his enemies, and brought him to such a position of bondage that his own death must be involved in that of the Philistines. Thus sin leaves consequences which produce suffering even after repentance and a return to a better life. (2) It was also an instance of that strange law which makes the greatest good to men depend on the *sacrifice of the benefactor*. It has thus something in common with the death of Christ, though with many points of difference, Samson's death involving the destruction of his enemies, while Christ's death is expressly designed to give salvation to *his* enemies.—A.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XVII.

Ver. 1.—We here light upon quite a different kind of history from that which has preceded. We no longer have to do with judges and their mighty deeds in delivering Israel from his oppressors, but with two detached histories, which fill up the rest of the book, relating to the internal affairs of Israel. There is no note of time, except that they happened before the time of Saul the king (ch. xvii. 6; xviii. 1), and that Phinehas the son of Eleazar was alive at the time of the occurrence of the second (ch. xx. 28). Both, no doubt, are long prior to Samson. The only apparent connection of the history of Micah with that of Samson is that both relate to the tribe of Dan, and it may be presumed were contained in the annals of that tribe. Compare the opening of the Books of Samuel (1 Sam. i. 1). *Mount Ephraim*, i. e. the hill country of Ephraim, as in ch. iii. 27; vii. 24, &c.

Ver. 2.—*The eleven hundred*. See ch. xvi. 5, note. *Thou cursedst*. The Cethib and the Alexandrian Codex of the Septuagint read, *Thou cursedst*, i. e. adjuredst me, which is a better reading. There is a direct and verbal reference to the law contained in

JUDGES,

Levit. v. 1. The word *thou cursedst* here and the voice of *swearing* in Leviticus are the same root. It was in consequence of this *adjuration* that Micah confessed his guilt. Compare Matt. xxvi. 63, when our Lord, on the adjuration of the high priest, broke his silence and confessed that he was Christ, the Son of God. In Achan's confession (Josh. vii. 19, 20) there is no distinct reference to Levit. v. 1, though this may have been the ground of it.

Ver. 3.—*I had wholly dedicated*. It is not clear whether the words are to be rendered as in the A. V., *had dedicated*, expressing the dedication of them before they were stolen, or whether they merely express her present purpose so to dedicate them. But the A. V. makes very good sense. Her former purpose had been that the money should be given for her son's benefit to make his house an house of gods. Now that he had confessed, she resumed her purpose. *Now therefore I restore it unto thee*—that is, in the shape of the graven and molten images, as it follows in the next verse. The narrative gives a curious example of the semi-idolatry of the times. *A graven image and a molten image*. There is a good deal of difficulty in assigning the

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exact meaning of the two words here used, and their relation to one another in the worship to which they belong. *The molten image* (*massechah*), however, seems to be pretty certainly the *metal*, here the *silver*, image of a calf, the form which the corrupt worship of Jehovah took from the time when Aaron made the molten calf (Exod. xxxii. 4, called there *egel massechah*, a molten calf) to the time when Jeroboam set up the golden calves at Dan and Bethel (1 Kings xii. 28, 29). And that *massechah* means something *molten* is certain both from its etymology (*nasach*, to pour) and from what Aaron said in Exod. xxxii. 24: "I cast it into the fire, and there came out this calf." Here too Micah's mother gives the silver to the *founder*, i. e. to the fuser of metals. The *pesel*, or *graven image*, on the other hand, is something hewn or graven, whether in wood or stone, and sometimes overlaid with gold and silver (Deut. vii. 25). One might have thought, from the language of ver. 4, and from the mention of the *pesel* alone in ch. xviii. 30, 31, that only one image is here intended, which was graven with the chisel after it was cast, as Aaron's calf seems to have been. But in ch. xviii. 17, 18 they are mentioned separately, with the ephod and teraphim named between them, so that they must be distinct. From the above passages the *pesel* or *graven image* would seem to have been the most important object, and the difficulty is to assign the true relation of the *massechah* or *molten image* to it. Hengstenberg thinks the *massechah* was a pedestal on which the *pesel* stood, and that the ephod was the robe with which the *pesel* was clothed, and that the teraphim were certain tokens or emblems attached to the ephod which gave oracular answers. But this is not much more than guess-work. Bertheau considers the ephod, here as elsewhere, to be the priest's garment, put on when performing the most solemn services, and specially when seeking an answer from God. And he thinks that the *massechah* formed a part of the ornament of the ephod, because in ch. xviii. 18 the Hebrew has "the *pesel* of the ephod." The teraphim he thinks are idols, a kind of *Dii minores* associated with the worship of Jehovah in this impure worship. But there does not seem to be any means at present of arriving at any certainty. The *massechah* might be a rich gold or silver overlaying of the wooden image, possibly movable, or it might be the separate image of a calf supposed to belong, as it were, to the *pesel*, and to symbolise the attributes of the Godhead.

Ver. 4.—*Yet he restored.* Rather, *So he restored*, repeating what was said in ver. 3, and adding the consequence, that his mother

took two hundred shekels and gave them to the founder. It is a great puzzle to explain why *two hundred shekels* only are here spoken of, and what became of the other *nine hundred*. Bertheau thinks the *two hundred* were different from the eleven hundred, and were the fifth part of the whole value stolen, which the thief, according to Levit. vi. 5, was bound to give in addition to the principal. He therefore translates ver. 4 thus: "So he restored the money to his mother (and his mother took two hundred shekels), and she gave it (the money = 1100 shekels) to the founder," &c. Others understand that two hundred only were actually made into the graven and molten image, and the other nine hundred were devoted to other expenses of the worship. *In the house of Micah.* This explains, *Now I will restore it unto thee*, and, *for my son to make*, &c., in ver. 3.

Ver. 5.—*And the man Micah, &c.* It is impossible to say for certain whether the state of things here described in respect of Micah preceded the events narrated in the preceding verses, or was consequent upon them. If it preceded, then we have the reason of his mother's vow: she wished to make her son's "house of God" complete by the addition of a graven and molten image. If it was consequent upon his mother's vow, then we have in the opening verses of this chapter a history of the circumstances of the foundation of Micah's "house of God," which was to play an important part in the colony of Danites, whose proceedings are related in the following chapter, and for the sake of which this domestic history of Micah is introduced. *House of gods.* Rather, *of God* (Elohim); for the worship was of Jehovah, only with a corrupt and semi-idolrous ceremonial. *An ephod.* See ch. viii. 26, 27, note. *Teraphim.* See Gen. xxxi. 19 (images, A. V.; teraphim, Heb.); 1 Sam. xv. 23 (idoltry, A. V.; teraphim, Heb.); xix. 13 (an image, A. V.; teraphim, Heb.); Hosea iii. 4, &c. They seem to have been a kind of Penates, or household gods, and were used for divination (Ezek. xxi. 21; Zech. x. 2). *Became his priest.* One function of the priest, and for which it is likely he was much resorted to, was to inquire of God by the ephod (ch. xviii. 5, 6). What his other duties might be does not appear.

Ver. 6.—*There was no king.* This must have been written in the days of the kings of Israel and Judah, and perhaps with reference to the efforts of such kings as Aza (1 Kings xv. 13) and Jehoshaphat (1 Kings xxii. 43) to put down idoltry.

Ver. 7.—*Of the family of Judah.* These words are difficult to explain. If the man was a Levite he could not be of the family

or tribe of Judah. Some explain the words to be merely a more accurate definition of Bethlehem-judah, as if he would say, *I mean Bethlehem in the tribe of Judah*. Others explain them to mean that he was one of a family of Levites who had settled in Bethlehem, and so came to be reckoned in civil matters as belonging to Judah. Others, that he was of the family of Judah on his mother's side, which might be the cause of his settling at Bethlehem. But many commentators think them spurious, as they are not found in the Septuagint (Cod. Vat.), nor in the Peschito, nor in No. 440 of De Rossi's MSS. The Septuagint has *Bethlehem of the family of Judah*.

Ver. 8.—*From Bethlehem-judah*. Rather, *out of*. The whole phrase means, *out of the city*, viz., *out of Bethlehem*. Mount Ephraim—the hill country of Ephraim, as ver. 1, where see note.

Vers. 10, 11.—*A father*. This is not a common application of the word *father* in the Old Testament. The prominent idea seems to be one of honour, combined with authority to teach and advise. It is applied to prophets (2 Kings ii. 12; vi. 21; xiii. 14), and to Joseph (Gen. xlv. 8). The idea is implied in the converse phrase of *son*, applied to those to whom the prophets stood in the relation of spiritual fathers (see 2 Kings viii. 9; Prov. iv. 10, 20, and frequently elsewhere). The abuse of the feeling which dictates the term as applied to human teachers is reproved by our Lord (Matt. xxiii. 9). It has been freely used in the Christian Church, as in the titles *papa* or *pope* applied to bishops, *abbot* and *abbas*, *father in God*, *fathers of the Church*, &c. Here there is perhaps a special reference to the function of Micah's priest to ask counsel of God, and then give

that counsel to those who came to inquire (see note to ver. 5). It may be added that the idea of *counsellor* seems to be inherent in the word *cohen* or *priest*, as in 2 Sam. viii. 18; 1 Kings iv. 5, &c. *Ten shekels*—a little over a pound of our money, but probably equivalent to £20, when considered relatively to articles of consumption. *A suit of apparel*. There is great doubt as to the exact meaning of the word rendered *suit* in this connection. The word means anything *arranged*, i. e. put in a *rank*, or *row*, or *order*. In Exod. xl. 23 it is applied to the shewbread: "He ordered the bread in order." Thence it came to mean the *estimation* or *worth* of a person or thing—something as we use the word *rank*. From this last sense some interpret the word here to mean the *worth* or *price* of his clothes. Others, including St. Jerome and the Septuagint, interpret it a *pair* of vestments, meaning summer and winter clothing. But perhaps the A. V., *suit*, meaning the whole set of under and upper garments, is after all the best interpretation. The *Levite* went in. The Hebrew is *went*, i. e. according to the common use of the word, *went his way*. And such is probably the meaning here. He went his way to consider the proposal made to him. The result is given in the next verse: *And the Levite was content*, &c.

Ver. 13.—*Then said Micah, &c*. We may notice this incidental proof that the Levites in the time of Micah held the religious position which is ascribed to them in the Pentateuch. I have a *Levite*. Rather, *the Levite*, meaning the particular Levite of whom it is the question. A *Levite* would be without the article, as in ver. 7, or would be expressed as in ch. xix. 1 (Heb.), *a man a Levite*.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—13.—*The superstitious worship of the true God*. The natural history of religion is a very curious one. There is first the broad division between worship given to false gods and that which is given to the one true and living God, Creator of heaven and earth. The heathen of old, like the heathen of to-day, worshipped those that were no gods. Either they had no existence at all, and were the creatures of man's imagination, divinities supposed to preside over the various powers of nature and the affections of the human heart; gods of the weather, of the earth, and sea, and sky; malignant spirits supposed to influence human destiny, and requiring gifts to propitiate them; personifications of light, or death, or even of criminal human passions; or else they were beings who had indeed a real existence,—sun, moon, stars, stones, animals, angels, demons, or the spirits of dead men,—but who were not God. This worship of false gods we know from Holy Scripture, and from the annals of all nations, was prevalent over the whole ancient world, and we know that it exists in heathen lands to the present day. But that is not the form of corrupt religion to which this chapter calls our attention, nor is it that into which there is any probability of Christians falling in this nineteenth century. We turn, therefore, to the varieties of the worship offered to the one true God. And first to look at the particular case before us. The mother of Micah seems to have been in

her way a devout woman. The scraping together 1100 shekels was probably not effected without considerable effort and self-denial, for it was a large sum (more than £110), eleven times the yearly wages of the Levite. She meant to consecrate it to Jehovah, the God of Israel. She seems too to have been a good mother, for she intended this consecration to be for her son's benefit, and her language and conduct, when her son confessed his guilt, were pious and forgiving. And yet we find her disobeying the express command of God, and making a graven and a molten image to be used in his worship and service. In like manner we find Micah giving signs of a tender conscience and of the fear of God in confessing his sin when adjured according to the law; we find him anxious for the favour of God, and looking to him to do him good; we find him liberal and large-hearted in providing at his own expense for the worship of God; and yet, with a strange inconsistency, we find him doing the very things which God's word forbade, and setting up images, and teraphim, and a superstitious ephod in a "house of God" of his own devising, and under a priest of his own consecration. In like manner again we find even Aaron making a golden calf for the people to worship, and saying (Septuagint), or encouraging the people to say, "This is thy God, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt," and building an altar before it, and keeping a feast in its honour. We read of the golden calves of Jeroboam, and we read too of the high places and the sacrifices upon them even under the pious kings. These then are distinct examples of the superstitious worship of the true God, and lead us to the anxious question, how we are to worship God. Under the Old Testament this was not left to chance or human choice. In the nonage of the Church, before the coming of Christ, all the ordinances of Divine service were prescribed with minuteness and exactness. The sanctuary itself, the Aaronic priesthood, the Levitical ministrations, the feasts of the Lord, the gifts and offerings and devotions of the people, were all ordered by the authority of the word of God. But under the New Testament, when the fulness of the time is come, and the Church has entered into the full possession of the privileges of adopted sons, it is so no longer. Besides a few general principles and broad rules, and the institution of the two sacraments, and the Lord's Prayer, the Church has received from Holy Scripture no form of Divine service. She has to frame her rules and canons of Divine worship according to the light and wisdom vouchsafed to her by the Holy Spirit of God. In doing this she must have regard to two things. 1. The character and mind of God, so that the worship may be of a kind that will be pleasing and acceptable to him. 2. The nature and character of man, so that the worship may be of a kind to assist the worshipper to raise his heart to God, and impress him with a sense of the majesty, and holiness, and goodness of God. With regard to the *first*, the general intimations of him who alone knows the things of God, even the Holy Spirit of God, are very clear. "God is a spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." "Let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name." "To do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased" (see too Micah vi. 6—8). Every attempt to substitute costly gifts, or gorgeous ceremonies, or showy processions, or lights, or music, or gestures, or anything bodily and sensuous, for the ritual of repentance, faith, fear, love, and self-consecration—consecration of the will and affections—to the service of Almighty God can only be made in ignorance of his character and mind as revealed to us in Holy Scripture. It is as truly superstitious as were Micah's images, and teraphim, and ephod, and house of God. With regard to the *second*, the outward accessories of worship must be of a kind to assist the worshipper in his endeavour to draw near to God and worship him with all the powers of his soul. Under the pretence of purely spiritual worship, it is very easy so to get rid of all outward acts and circumstances as to get rid of worship itself. The light of religion in the soul cannot burn unless in an atmosphere which feeds the flame. Reverence and awe, prayer and praise, forgetfulness of the world, and thoughts of heaven need to be quickened and encouraged by the posture of the body, by the words of the lips, by sights and sounds expressive of those invisible things which the soul seeks to handle in its approaches to the throne of God. It is therefore a legitimate

subject of consideration what forms of worship are most calculated to increase and heighten the devotion of the worshippers. Forms which tend merely to please the senses are worthless; forms which tend to soothe the conscience of the impenitent, and to stifle its questionings by creating a feeling of duty performed and of satisfaction made to God, are pernicious; and forms which so fill the thoughts as to the manner of performing them as to leave no room for thoughts of God are injuries rather than benefits to the soul. Forms, again, which leave the soul self-satisfied, which convey a false impression of God's favour and grace being given when he is really displeased and offended, and which comfort and encourage those who ought to be horribly afraid and trembling for fear of God's judgments, are manifestly destructive of the souls of those for whose benefit they purport to exist. A faithful Church will root up all such as dishonouring to God and as very hurtful to man. One other characteristic of superstitious worship must be noted. It is compatible with vice, and with the dominion of sin in the heart. Superstition has no tendency to correct the principles of action, or to purify the thoughts and affections of the inner man. The sequel of Micah's history supplies a notable instance of this. The Danites, in their superstitious desire to possess the images of Micah's chapel, and the religious services of Micah's priest, scrupled not to break the commandments of God by stealing, and, if need were, by committing murder. Stealing sacred relics and transporting them by guile or violence from one religious house to another is a well-known form of mediæval superstition. The brigands in the mountains of Italy have been often known to kneel before an image of the Virgin, and ask the blessing of the priest or bishop, and then return to their work of plunder or murder. Superstition is no check upon the passions, and no bar to the reckless pursuit of what men deem to be their interests or know to be their desires. There is no gulf between superstitious worship and immoral conduct. The man who mistakes the aspect of God towards superstitious vanities is prone to mistake also his aspect towards moral disorder and sin. But he who really enters into the tabernacle of God, and communes with God in spirit, comes forth with his face shining with inward righteousness, the reflection of God's glory in the face of Jesus Christ. His life is a continuation of his prayers, his praise culminates in good works. In the interests of moral goodness, as well as for the honour of God, it is of supreme importance that the worship of the Almighty be free from superstition.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—13.—*The history of a man-made ministry*:—1. *Its genesis*. It belongs to the main design of the book to show how the various disruptive tendencies of a religious and social nature increased unchecked when "there was no king in Israel." The book begins with a note of unity—"the children of Israel asked Jehovah." Repeated idolatrous defections are chronicled, and mention made of the setting up of an ephod in Ophrah, the city of Gideon, and its evil consequences. In one respect the schisms from the national religion were even more dangerous than complete departure from it. The unity of Israel was thus destroyed in its chief sanction and sign, the universal sacrifice and confession at Shiloh. Another of these schismatic points of departure is here related. The description is full of realistic force, and is governed by the dogmatic purpose of exposing the immoral motives of it, and thus discrediting it in the eyes of every true Israelite. It is exposed as the private and selfish appropriation of a national blessing. As the political unity of Israel depended upon maintaining a central religious authority and a uniform ritual and priesthood, the setting up of a house of gods was in itself, irrespectively of its motives, a crime of the first magnitude. The New Testament idea of Church and ministry is different. There the unity of the Spirit is the prevailing aim. But whenever separation originates in similar motives to those here depicted, the sin of schism equally exists.

I. THE CHARACTER OF ITS AUTHORS. Avaricious mother, dishonest son. Both superstitious. Not honesty, but fear of a curse, actuates Micah to restore the "eleven hundred shekels." The getting back of the money is the chief concern of the

mother, and so she straightway blesses whom she had cursed (cf. James iii. 10). Only 200 shekels are actually appropriated to the end proposed.

II. ITS MOTIVES. Apparently the warding off of the curse is the first concern with both. But an equally powerful motive was the securing of the gain resulting from fees and gifts. In this way they would become rich. Where the aim is selfish and impure, the character of the worship becomes of secondary consequence, and the latent tendency towards idolatry begins to show itself. It is the motive that is of chief concern in questions of religion. Everything else will be dominated by this: "Is it for self, or is the glory of God my chief aim?" Founders of churches and religious institutions, and candidates for the ministry, should examine themselves ere they are committed to the work upon which they have set their hearts.

III. THE COMPLEXION OF THE WORSHIP. It is a "house of gods," containing a "graven image and a molten image," an ephod, and teraphim, which is the outcome of their religious or superstitious zeal. In its nature eclectic, in the crudest sense of the word, this system of religious worship is on the face of it a sacred means to a vulgar, secular end. The house became a place of irregular worship, of sooth-saying and divination.

IV. THE INSTRUMENT OF THEIR DESIGNS. A son is the first expedient in the direction of a priesthood; but this is not considered sufficiently authoritative. Accident throws in the way a young Levite of Bethlehem-judah, who appears to have taken to a wandering life through discontent, curiosity, idleness, or restlessness. A shiftless, unscrupulous, easily impressible character, in a needy condition, and with the Levitical status, just the fitting occupant of such an office. The undue influence of Micah is thus secured permanently. Promising that he should be a "father and a priest," and receive clothing, board, and "ten shekels" wages, to the needy adventurer "making his way" he thus becomes patron; and the promised standing of the priest relatively to Micah is soon reversed—he "was unto him as one of his sons." The consecration too is from Micah. The good and the evil of patronage, private and otherwise, in religion; the dependence of the ministry—"like people like priest;" the question of "consecration" and "orders."

V. THE SUPERSTITIOUS PRESUMPTION OF FALSE RELIGION. There is the more care as to the external ritual, the priestly "succession," &c. in proportion to the earthliness of the underlying motive. 1. *Where the heart is wrong undue reliance is placed upon externals in religion.* The priest's advantage of descent was vitiated by his becoming a mercenary and a schismatic. Rites and ceremonies are multiplied in default of the "Presence" at Shiloh and its simple service. The error is in placing the virtue in the external observances instead of the reality of worship, purity of life and motive, and the presence of the Spirit of God. Romanism has been defined as "a system of position and imposition, or of posture and imposture." 2. *Jehovah is supposed to countenance a religion which is essentially opposed to him.* God cannot take rank or be associated with other gods. His glory must be the chief object of the worshipper, the priest, and the patron. Selfish aims, disobedience to his clearly-revealed will concerning his service and Church, can never receive his blessing. Yet observe the self-deception of Micah. He does not see all this, or the evils soon to come upon him. On the other hand, "the pure in heart" shall see God. His presence is independent of the external completeness, &c. of ritual. True priesthood is a Divine unction, and not a human monopoly.—M.

Vers. 1—4.—*Avarice and superstition.* The story of Micah and his mother illustrates the strange blending of avarice and superstition which may be observed in those people who have lowered themselves to a worldly habit of life without entirely losing the influence of religion.

I. WHEN RELIGION SINKS INTO SUPERSTITION, ITS UNWORLDLY SPIRIT IS QUENCHED AND AVARICE IS UNRESTRAINED. The religion of Israel is now most degraded, and one result of its degradation is seen in a corresponding lowering of morality. Great devotion to a superstitious religious system is not incompatible with a very low tone of moral life. 1. This is seen in the *avarice of Micah's mother*, (1) Tempting to deception, if not complete dishonesty, on the part of the son, (2) giving rise to unseemly temper and blind cursing on her own side, and (3) to a mean and unworthy

attempt at restoring family peace by a compromise between selfish greed and religious devotion—200 shekels only are devoted to the image, and, though Micah had intended all to go to this object, the remaining 900 shekels are retained by the mother. 2. The same degradation of morality is seen in the *unworthy conduct of the young man*. He shows no confidence in his mother. He thinks he can honour God with the proceeds of deception. It is only under a dark religion of superstition that we can suppose the end to justify the means—a sacrificial object to excuse domestic fraud.

II. WHEN, UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF A WORLDLY SPIRIT, AVARICE IS UNRESTRAINED, RELIGION TENDS TO SINK INTO SUPERSTITION. Covetousness is idolatry (Col. iii. 5). The habit of setting the affections on earthly things blinds the soul to the perception of pure spiritual truth. This is seen in the story of Micah and his mother. 1. Micah displays a *dread of his mother's curse*, but no consciousness of guilt. His confession and restitution are not the result of repentance, but of superstitious fear. 2. His mother shows *no grief* at the revelation of his conduct, but only delight at seeing the money, and a desire to remove the effect of her curse by pronouncing a blessing on her son. 3. Subsequently the young man *dreads to touch the money* which is affected with his mother's curse, though she offers it to him, and she feels bound to use it, or part of it, in the service of God. 4. Religious feelings do not seem to affect the moral conduct of either person, but only to *incline them to image-making*. Thus worldly greed drags down religion till this becomes merely a worldly habit of gross idolatry and magic spells. We may see in the present day religions of mere ritual and superstitious practices attracting the most worldly people, and not restraining, but rather shaping themselves into the mould of their low and earthly affections.—A.

Ver. 6.—*No king*. The writer of the Book of Judges more than once attributes the social disorders of Israel to the want of a king. This idea has its bearings on national interests and on private conduct.

I. THE NEED OF A KING IN CONNECTION WITH NATIONAL INTERESTS. 1. *A centre of authority is essential to the peace and prosperity of a nation*. As the first duty of a government is to maintain order, so the need of authority and organisation for the maintenance of order makes the establishment of a government essential to a nation. This is necessary, (1) to punish violence and crime, (2) to restrain the unjust encroachment of one man upon the rights of another, (3) to arbitrate between the conflicting claims of individual men and of great classes of the community, (4) to promote national objects which are too large for private enterprise, and (5) to cement the unity of the nation and organise this for defence against foreign invasion. 2. *When a nation is not prepared for self-government it is best for it to be ruled by one strong hand*. Apart from political requisites, certain moral conditions must be fulfilled before a people can practise self-government. There must be unity of sympathy and self-control. Neither of these conditions was fulfilled by the tribes of Israel in the days of the Judges. Mutual jealousy and antagonism prevailed among them, and violent measures were too common for the minority to submit peaceably to the will of the majority. The spiritual vision of the Divine King which had maintained the unity of the nation in the days of Moses was fading away, and now that sublime and unearthly government was nearly lost, there was no hope for the people but in the establishment of a human monarchy. It is foolish to maintain in words an ideal which is too high for practice. Better confess our degeneracy and shape our conduct according to the means within reach.

II. THE NEED OF A KING IN CONNECTION WITH PRIVATE CONDUCT. The soul needs a king. We are born to obey. We need some authority above us to keep us right. 1. It is not *safe* for every man to do what is right in his own eyes, because (1) we are swayed by passion and selfish greed, and (2) in our best moments we are liable to prejudice, and are too short-sighted to see what is best. The anarchy of universal self-seeking without restraint would bring the world to ruin. For the good of all it is necessary that each should not be at liberty simply to please himself. 2. It is not *right* for every man to do that which is right in his own eyes. We are members one of another, and are morally bound to respect the rights, and needs, and wishes of our

neighbours. We are children of the great King, and under a supreme obligation to respect his law. The Church is not a republic; it is a kingdom. The Christian is not free to follow his fancy; he is required to submit to and to obey the mind and will of Christ. Christian liberty is not found in the license of self-will, but in the willingness of obedience and the love which delights to fulfil the will of God and to do to others as we would that they should do to us.—A.

Ver. 13.—*Faith in the priest.* I. FAITH IN THE PRIEST IMPLIES A DESIRE FOR GOD'S BLESSING. The priest is trusted for his influence with God. He is sought after because God's blessing is desired. So far the faith in the priest indicates good qualities. It is a sign of religious ideas, though these are vague and perverted. There is something pathetic in Micah's utterance. Now at last he may expect blessing. His mother's graven image did not secure this; his temple and its elaborate worship left him dissatisfied; but he can have no rest till he is assured that God is blessing him. He is wealthy, but wealth will not satisfy him without the blessing of God. So he presses on to find this one source of true peace. How many men are ready to mock at Micah's superstition who have no gleam of his true faith! It is better to be seeking the blessing of God, though in mistaken ways, than, while discerning the folly of these ways by the light of a cold rationalism, to be dead to any yearnings for the supreme good.

II. FAITH IN THE PRIEST IMPLIES A CONSCIOUS NEED OF AN INTERCESSOR. All priestly religions spring out of a true instinct of conscience. They are not simply the fabrications of a tyrannical priesthood. Religion requires a priest. It is right to feel, like Micah, unworthy and unable to obtain God's blessings for ourselves, and, like him, to look for an intercessor. Christianity is based on these ideas; it is the religion of a mediator, a priest. Christ satisfies this desire to seek God's blessing through the help of another, through the work of a priest (Heb. vi. 20).

III. FAITH IN THE PRIEST IMPLIES SUPERSTITIOUS TRUST IN RELIGIOUS OFFICIALISM. The error is to be found, (1) in choosing a merely human priest, and (2) in placing a wrong kind of trust in him, and not simply in believing in the idea of priesthood. 1. This priestly superstition expects blessings *irrespective of the character of the priest*. Micah has had a priest before—his own son. He has no reason to believe that the Levite is a better man. He only knows that he belongs to the sacred tribe of temple officials. This is characteristic of the superstition of priestliness. It supposes that the office sanctifies the man, not the man the office. It looks for good from the priest simply through his official functions. Christ is a priest not by reason of birth or anointing (he was not of the tribe of Levi), but by reason of nature, and character, and work. 2. This priestly superstition expects blessings *apart from the religious character of the recipient*. Micah believes that the mere presence of the Levite in his house will benefit him. He does not think of the Levite influencing his character for good. So there are people who imagine the priest can do them good apart from their own character and conduct. But Christ, the true Priest, only brings to us the blessings secured by his sacrifice and intercession when we submit to him so as to receive a new birth to a holy life.—A.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Ver. 1.—*In those days, &c.* See ch. xvii. 6. *The tribe of the Danites sought them an inheritance, &c.* This does not mean that the whole tribe of Dan were still seeking their inheritance. The bulk of the tribe, as we read in Josh. xix. 40—48, did receive their inheritance by lot before the death of Joshua (*ibid.* ver. 49) and Eleazar (*ibid.* ver. 51). But as long as any part of the tribe was not settled, the tribe as such, in its unity, was still seeking a settlement. The land

for their inheritance had not yet fallen to the tribe in its integrity. This is in part accounted for by what we read ch. i. 34, that the Amorites would not suffer the children of Dan to come down to the valley, so that those who could not get possession of their land there would be crowded into other parts of the tribal territory. These Danites, of whom we are here reading, were dwelling in Zorah and Eshtaol (ch. xiii. 1, 25), as we see by vers. 2, 11. *Unto that day, &c.* Translate this clause, *For unto that day the land (meaning the whole land)*

had not fallen unto them in the midst of the tribes of Israel for an inheritance. The words *the land* must be supplied after the analogy of Numb. xxxiv. 2. What follows in this chapter is a more detailed account of what was briefly mentioned in Josh. xix. 47, where, however, the A. V. *went out too little for them* is not a translation of the Hebrew text, which is very difficult to explain. Houbigant, by an ingenious conjecture, gives the sense *was too narrow for them*. From the mention of this migration in the Book of Joshua, it is probable that it took place not many years after Joshua's death.

Ver. 2.—**They came to Mount Ephraim** (ch. xvii. 1, 8). The hill country of Ephraim would be on their way to the north from Eshtaol. They would naturally avoid the plain where the Amorites and Philistines were strong.

Ver. 3.—**When. Rather, while.** By the house. Rather, *in or at* the house. **They knew the voice,** having, as some think, known him before he left Bethlehem, or perceiving a southern accent. But it may merely mean that they discerned his voice as he was singing or reciting prayers in the house of God. Micah's house seems to have been a collection of houses (vers. 14, 22), approached by one gateway (ver. 16), in one of which the Levite dwelt. **They turned in thither.** This seems to have been next morning, when they were starting on their journey. Hearing the Levite's voice, they turned aside into his house. **What makest thou, &c. Rather, What doest thou in this place? and what is thy business here?**

Ver. 4.—**And I am his priest, or, to be his priest.**

Ver. 5.—**Ask counsel of God, or simply Ask God,** as the identical phrase is rendered in ch. i. 2, where see note.

Ver. 6.—**And the priest said, &c.,** having first, it is to be presumed, put on the ephod (see ch. viii. 26, 27, note; xvii. 5). **Before the Lord is your way, i. e.** he looks upon it with favour, has respect unto it, and will make it successful, as it is said in Ps. xxxiv. 15: "The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous." "Whether," says Bishop Patrick, "he had any answer from the teraphim, or feigned it out of his own head, is uncertain."

Ver. 7.—**To Laish.** Called in Josh. xix. 47 *Leshem*, which is perhaps a corruption caused by the statement that they called it after the name (*Ke-shem*) of Dan, or it may be only another form. The name is strangely corrupted in the Septuagint of ver. 29 of this chapter into *Oulamais*, and in Josh. xix. 47 into *Lasen-dan*. St. Jerome, misled by the Septuagint, has *Lesem Dan*. Laish was situated four Roman miles from Bania, on the road to Tyre, on one of the sources

of the Jordan. Robinson identifies it unhesitatingly with *Tell-el-Kady*, "the mount of the judge" (where *Kady* has the same meaning as *Dan*), close to the great fountain, "one of the largest fountains in the world," called *el-Leddán*, which is the source of the lesser Jordan (Josephus), and which may very possibly be the ultimate form of *ed-Dan*, corrupted into *Eddan*, *el-Eddan*, *Leddán*, *el-Leddán*, by successive incorporations of the article *el* into the word itself, of which there are other examples. The remainder of this verse is exceedingly obscure; a probable translation is as follows: "And they saw the people that was in the midst of it dwelling in security after the manner of the Zidonians, '*quiet and secure, and none doing any injury to any one in the land, possessing wealth*;' and they were far from the Zidonians, and had no business with any man." The words in italics are probably a poetical quotation, descriptive of the people of Laish, which would account for the peculiar diction and the grammatical changes; for whereas the word *dwelling* is in the feminine gender, agreeing with *people*, the words *quiet and secure and possessing* are in the masculine, which can be readily accounted for if they are a quotation. This would also account for the tautology, "dwelling in security," "quiet and secure," and for the poetical character of the phrase "*possessing wealth*," and for the unusual form of the word here rendered *wealth* (*etzer* with an *ain*, instead of the usual *otzar* with an *aleph*), in accordance with the Septuagint and Vulgate and Gesenius, who derive the meaning of *wealth* from *collecting*, from which the common word *atzereth* derives its meaning of a *collection* or *congregation* of people.

Ver. 9.—**To go, and to enter.** The exact meaning is, Be not slothful to go (*i. e.* to go on your way from hence), so as to enter in and possess the land. This would be expressed by leaving out *to before enter—to go and enter*.

Ver. 10.—Translate, "When ye come, ye shall come unto a people secure; and the land is very large (for God hath given it into your hands), a place where there is no want," &c. The Hebrew of *very large* is, literally, *wide on both hands*. The parenthetic *for God hath given it into your hands*, merely explains why they speak so confidently about it (cf. Deut. viii. 9).

Ver. 11.—**The family**—meaning the *tribe* (see ch. xiii. 2, note, and cf. Josh. vii. 17). Possibly a reason for the use of the word *family* here and in ver. 2, as applied to Dan, may be that there was only one family in the tribe of Dan, that of the Shuhamites (Numb. xxvi. 42). **Six hundred men.** With their wives and sisters and children (see

ver. 21), the whole company must have amounted to two or three thousand souls.

Ver. 12.—*Kirjath-jearim* (city of forests), otherwise called *Kirjath-Baal* and *Baalath*, in the hill country of Judah (Josh. xv. 60). It lay on the border of Benjamin (Josh. xviii. 14, 15). Its modern representative in all probability is *Kurit-el-enab*, nine miles from Jerusalem, on the road to Joppa. The district is still very woody. *Mahanah-dan*, i. e. the camp of Dan (see ch. xiii. 25). *Behind*, i. e. to the west of. The exact site of *Mahanah-dan* has not been identified with certainty. Mr. Williams was shown a site called *Beit-Mahanem* in the Wady Ismail which answers well in position, but it has not been noticed by any other traveller ('Dictionary of Bible').

Ver. 14.—In these houses, showing that Beth-Micah, the house of Micah, was in fact a small village (see ver. 22).

Ver. 15.—Even unto the house, &c. Rather, at Beth-Micah.

Ver. 17.—Went up, viz., into the upper chamber, where it appears the chapel was. So we read in 2 Kings xxiii. 12 that there were altars on the roof of the upper chamber of Ahas (cf. Jer. xix. 13). And came up, and took. There is no *and* in the Hebrew, and the tense of the verb is changed. A fuller stop must be put after *went up*. And then the account proceeds, with a certain solemnity of diction, *They came in thither; they took the graven image, and the ephod, and the teraphim, and the molten image* (full stop). The narrative goes on, *Now the priest was standing in the entering of the gate, &c. But these five went into Micah's house, &c.*, as just related, and of course brought them out to the gate where the priest was standing with the 600 Danites.

Ver. 18.—The carved image. It should be the *graven image*, as elsewhere. The Hebrew text here has the *graven image of the ephod*, as was noticed in ch. xvii. 3, note. But it is very possible that the *vav*, *and*, has fallen out of the text by accident, and it does not seem likely that a different phrase should be adopted in this one place from that followed throughout in the enumeration of the articles in Micah's chapel, so that the A. V. is probably right. Then said the priest, &c. When he saw the idols and teraphim in the hands of the five men he cried out in alarm. It is remarkable that here and in the preceding verse he is styled the priest.

Ver. 19.—Lay thine hand upon thy mouth. Cf. Job xxi. 5; xxix. 9; xl. 4. A father and a priest. See ch. xvii. 10, note.

Ver. 20.—The priest's heart was glad, &c. The prospect of greater dignity and greater emolument stifled all sentiments of gratitude and loyalty to Micah, and made him

cheerfully connive at an act of theft and sacrilege.

Ver. 21.—They turned, i. e. turned their backs upon Beth-Micah, and went on their way to the north. The little ones. The term necessarily includes the women of the emigrant party. Compare Jacob's care for his wives and children (Gen. xxxiii. 1—5); only Jacob expected an attack from Esau in front, the Danites an attack from Micah from behind. The carriage. It is the same word as is translated in Gen. xxxi. 1 *glory*; it might be rendered *valuables*. It would no doubt include the precious images and ephod which they had just stolen.

Ver. 22.—The houses near to Micah's house. See ver. 14, note. Near to, the same Hebrew word as is rendered *by* in ver. 3, where see note.

Ver. 23.—That thou comest, &c.—literally, that thou art gathered together, the same word as in ver. 22. It is the idea of the clan, or family, or tribe which causes the phrase. Just as *Israel* or *Judah* designates the whole nation, or the whole tribe, under the name of their patriarch, so here Micah would include all the clan who dwelt in Micah's house; and hence the Danites speak of Micah being gathered together.

Ver. 24.—My gods, or, as some render it, *my god*. But the plural is probably right, as Micah was thinking of the molten and graven images, and the teraphim, and called them *gods*, without perhaps meaning to imply that there was any God but Jehovah.

Ver. 25.—Run upon thee. Rather, *run, or fall, upon you*; it is the plural pronoun, comprehending the whole party. The argument of the Danites was the argument of the stronger.

Ver. 26.—The verse tells us what the two parties did, but not in the order in which an English writer would express it; for no doubt the Danites, encumbered with their women, and children, and baggage, did not go on their way till Micah and his party had turned back, though in English the contrary order is rather implied. The Hebrew merely puts the actions side by side, and leaves the order to be inferred.

Ver. 27.—And they. In the Hebrew the *they* is emphatic. It would be better expressed in English by repeating *The children of Dan*. The repetition of the epithets *quiet and secure*, as applied to the people of Laish, rather seems to indicate the writer's reprobation of the deed as cruel, like that of Simeon and Levi in slaying Hamor and Shechem. They smote them with the edge of the sword—a phrase denoting an exterminating slaughter (Exod. xxxiv. 26; Josh. xix. 47; 1 Sam. xv. 8, &c.). And they burnt the city, &c. Perhaps they had made the people and city a *cherem*, a devoted thing, and therefore

slew the one and burnt the other (cf. Numb. xxi. 3; Josh. viii. 19; xi. 11, &c.); or the burning of the city may have been one of the means by which they destroyed the people.

Ver. 28.—*Because it was far, &c.* He reverts again to the description given in ver. 7. *That lieth by Beth-Rehob.* It is literally, *which belongeth to Beth-Rehob*, i.e. the valley here spoken of was part of the territory of the Syrians of Beth-Rehob in the time of David (and very likely earlier), as we read in 2 Sam. x. 6. It seems to have taken its name, *House of Rehob*, from Rehob the father of Hadadezer, king of Zobah (2 Sam. viii. 12), and to have been called *Beth-Rehob* very much as Micah's settlement was called *Beth-Micah*. It was also called for shortness *Rehob*, as Numb. xiii. 21; Judg. i. 31; 2 Sam. x. 8. It was situated, as we learn from ch. i. 31, in the bounds of the tribe of Asher, in the extreme north of the Holy Land, near the entering in of Hamath, the site of which, however, is unknown (see Numb. xiii. 21). The valley is that through which the Leddan fountain flows (ver. 7, note), and is the upper part of the plain called *el-Hulleh*, which is the northern continuation of the Jordan valley. *They built a city.* Rather, *they rebuilt the city.*

Ver. 29.—*Howbeit Laish was the name, &c.* The strange form here given in the Septuagint, *Oulamaïs*, arises from their having taken the Hebrew word for *howbeit* (*oulam*) as part of the name, and left out the L of Laish (see ver. 7, note).

Vers. 30, 31.—*And the children of Dan, &c.* It was probably the long existence of this semi-idolatrous worship of the graven image at Dan that induced King Jeroboam to set up one of his golden calves at Dan, as we read 1 Kings xii. 28—30. *And Jonathan, the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh.* The Hebrew text really has *the son of Moses*. But a little *n* is written above the line between the M and the S of Moses (Mosheh),

so as to be read *Manasseh*, as thus: MSH; so that they avoided the pain of reading aloud that the grandson or descendant of Moses was an idolatrous priest, without actually altering the written text. It is indeed most sad that it should have been so, though like examples are not wanting, as, e.g., the sons of Eli and of Samuel. For Gershom the son of Moses see Exod. ii. 22; xviii. 3; 1 Chron. xxiii. 14—16. It does not follow that Jonathan, the priest of the Danites, was literally the son of Gershom. It may merely mean that he was of the family of which Gershom was the head. *Until the day of the captivity of the land.* There is great diversity of opinion as to the meaning of this phrase. Many understand

it, as is the obvious meaning of the words, of the Assyrian captivity (2 Kings xv. 29; xvii. 6). But some of the best commentators, as Kimchi among the Jews, and many moderns, think it refers to the taking captive of the ark by the Philistines in the days of Eli, because this is the time indicated in the next verse by the mention of the house of God in Shiloh. The ark of God never returned to Shiloh after it was taken thence (1 Sam. iv. 3, 4) and captured by the Philistines (*ibid.* ver. 11). It is also noticed that the expression, *The ark of God is gone into captivity* (is taken, A. V.), occurs in 1 Sam. iv. 21, 22. It certainly would be strange that one verse (30) should speak of the worship of the graven image lasting till the Assyrian conquest of the land, and the next verse (31) limit it to the time that the house of God was in Shiloh, some 300 years earlier. At the same time it should be noticed that ver. 30 speaks of the time that Jonathan's sons were priests to the tribe of Dan, and ver. 31 of the worship of Micah's image. It is quite possible that the descendants of Jonathan may have been appointed priests at Dan to Jeroboam's golden-calf worship, though the original graven image of Micah may have been destroyed by Saul or David; and in the interval between such destruction of Micah's image and the setting up of Jeroboam's calves they may have been the priests of an irregular worship on a high place at Tell-el-Kady. And this would enable us to give what is certainly its natural meaning to the words, "the captivity of the land." But no certainty can be arrived at without more actual knowledge. Many commentators adopt Houbigant's conjecture to read *ark for land* at the end of ver. 30 (*arbn* for *aretz*). Others think that some deportation of the Danites by the Syrians or other neighbouring people not recorded in history is here spoken of. *All the time the house of God, &c.* This must have been written not earlier than the time of Samuel, and possibly much later. The house of God, i.e. the tabernacle, was in Shiloh from the days of Joshua (Josh. xviii. 1) till the days of Eli (1 Sam. i. 3), after which we have no account of where the house of God was till the ark was brought up to Jerusalem by King David from the house of Obed-edom the Gittite (2 Sam. vi. 12), and placed in the tabernacle that David had pitched for it (2 Sam. vi. 17); but whether this was the tabernacle that had been pitched at Shiloh or a new one does not appear. It is not improbable that Samuel may have moved the tabernacle from Shiloh to Ramah (1 Sam. vii. 17). The ark had rested in the house of Abinadab at Baaleh or Kirjath-jearim for twenty years (1 Sam. vii. 2) previous to its removal by David.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—31.—*Society without a head ceasing to be society.* The writer of the five last chapters of the Book of Judges had a painful task to perform. Writing the history of his people, and they the people of God, he had to tell a tale of violence, plunder, bloodshed, brutality, civil war, and extermination, on the secular side, and of superstition, schism, and idolatry, on the religious side of his story. And we may observe, by the way, that we have a striking evidence of the truthfulness and impartiality of the narrator in this merciless exposure of the sins and misdeeds of his countrymen. Nor are we at a loss to draw the lesson which he intended us to draw from the account which he has given; for no fewer than four times in the course of his brief narrative does he impress upon the mind of his readers the fact that in the days when these shameful deeds were done "there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (ch. xvii. 6; xviii. 1; xix. 1; xxi. 25). No doubt the writer referred particularly to that government with which he was acquainted, the government of kings properly so called, of whom Saul was the first, and David and his long line were the successors. But when we remember that in its best days the Israelitish nation had no king but God, and was governed under him by such rulers as Moses, Joshua, Gideon, Samuel, and the other judges, we shall perceive that the lesson to be learnt is not so much that of the superiority of monarchy over other forms of government (however true this may be), as of the absolute necessity, for the religious and civil welfare of a people, that a firm government should exist, to control by the force of law the excesses of individual will, and to compel within certain limits the action of individuals for the sake of the public good. Looking at their several influences upon the body of the Israelite people, how pernicious was the theft by Micah of his mother's hoarded treasure; how injurious to the community was the idolatrous worship set up by Micah, and that for generation upon generation; how disastrous to the commonwealth of Israel was the brutal outrage of the men of Gibeah; how intolerable was the marauding expedition of the Danites, both to the quiet dwellers in the land and to peaceful neighbours beyond its border; and what a complete loosening of all the joints of social life do the several transactions display! Nowhere do we see any common aim for the common good, but each man's covetousness, superstition, lust, anger, cruelty, pursuing private objects at the expense of public interests. The ideas of a society, a commonwealth, a Church, a nation, were lost in individual selfishness. Now this was in a great measure due to the want of a central supreme authority to repress, to direct, and to overrule. Just as material nature, if the power of gravitation were removed, would fall to pieces, and all cohesion would be gone, so, without a common authority wielding the power of law, human society would fall to pieces, and be reduced to chaos. Men are blinded by their own passions; particular sections of society can see nothing but their own fancied interests; lawless violence would plunder here; impulsive zeal would rush onwards there; a fanatical superstition would set up its altars where it ought not; fierce rivalry would rise upon the ruins of its antagonist; revenge would glut itself with destruction; one trade would seek the suppression of all that stood in its way; one interest would devour another, one class supplant another, one rank tread down another. It is the business of law wielded by sovereign power to look with an equal eye upon all the different interests of the State, to favour all by favouring none at the expense of others, to repress all individual action which would hurt the whole, and to regulate all the separate forces which would be injurious to the whole. Law, like the eye of God, is impartial in its look-out; its end is to produce order, harmony, and peace. Under the even reign of law eccentric violence is unknown, and its steady but irresistible pressure gives consistency and strength to the whole fabric of society. Under its reign full scope is given to every energy for good; and all the scattered forces of the separate parts are concentrated for the benefit of the whole. Under its wholesome restraints the selfish passions of man are not allowed to injure themselves or others, and the folly of the foolish and the wickedness of the wicked are checked in their injurious courses. Not that which is right in his own eyes, and which self-will

desires, but that which the law, the reflection of God's mind, commands, is the rule by which every man's actions must be squared. The perfection of a human polity is one in which wise laws govern the whole social movement as surely as the laws of nature govern the material world. It is the interest of all classes of the community to bow to this supremacy of law, and to unite in a firm compact to support the central authority in repressing every act of lawlessness, whether committed by an individual or by a company. It is only thus that social chaos can be avoided, and that civil cosmos, which alone is civilisation, can be maintained for the true liberty and welfare of mankind. It is just the same with the Church of God, which is the commonwealth of his saints. In it the word of God must reign supreme. In it individual opinions, sentiments, wishes, and feelings must all be subordinated to the Divine law. In it selfish eccentricities, ambitions, activities must all be restrained by a wise and even rule if the Church is to be the abode of order, peace, and love. In the surrender of individual will to the discipline of the supreme authority the sacred commonwealth finds its perfect balance, and each member is enabled to yield that service which indeed is perfect freedom; because the unchecked power to do that which is right in his own eyes is not a man's liberty, but his bondage. Self-will is set in motion by sin; but law is the fruit of wisdom and justice moving for the happiness of all, securing right, and stopping up the gangways of wrong. From the spirit of lawlessness deliver thy Church, O Lord!

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—13.—*The history of a man-made ministry:—2. Its abuse.* A special instance of the manner in which it wrought mischief afforded in the migration of the Danites. The proximity of Micah's house to the great northern highway made it a natural resting-place for travellers, and so the spies find their way there. By them the young priest, who turns out to be a previous acquaintance, is recognised. The existence of the "house of gods" is thus made known, and they desire him to consult the oracle concerning their fortunes. Although their adventure was a wicked and unscrupulous one, they are told, "Go in peace: before the Lord is your way wherein ye go." The visit of the spies to Laish, their report to their brethren, and the setting out of the 600 Danites, who arrive in the first stage of their march once more at Micah's house, are then narrated. We see, therefore—

I. HOW A MERCENARY PRIESTHOOD AND SHRINE MAY BE PROSTITUTED TO BASE USES. The oracle at Shiloh was symbol and seal of the national unity, and its priesthood represented the national conscience. It would have been impossible for them to sanction such a crime. But it was otherwise with Micah's priest and "house of gods." The latter was a mercantile speculation, a private enterprise, and was therefore obnoxious to any temptation like this. A striking parallel to this is afforded by the Church of Rome, with its sale of indulgences, &c.

II. HOW EAGER UNHOLY MEN ARE FOR RELIGIOUS SANCTIONS IN THEIR FRAUDULENT AND MURDEROUS DEEDS. When religion becomes a matter of money, and its advantages are sold to the highest bidder, it ceases to be the judge of right and wrong. The contradiction between the errand upon which they were sent and the spirit of God's revelation ought to have struck them. Yet this is but one instance of an all but universal error. They imagine that true religion can call evil good and good evil.

III. HOW THEREBY A TURBULENT TRIBE IS ENCOURAGED IN ITS DESIGNS UPON A PEACEFUL DISTRICT, AND A PERMANENT WRONG IS INFLICTED. The moral latent in the incident is thereby sharply pointed. It must appear to all how mischievous, how subversive of human society and of religion, such an institution must be. The only safeguard against such evils is in the central authority at Shiloh being recognised, and that authority being enforced by a duly elected king.—M.

Vers. 14—31.—3. *Its transfer and establishment in a lawless community.* The spies had evidently taken counsel with the 600, for the theft of the gods is done in a cool, business-like way; and they have evidently a settled design concerning them. Everything that would encumber or be detrimental to them is sent on in front. The real or feigned remonstrance of the priest, and his willing compliance with their desire, and the pursuit by Micah, are realistic touches that add greatly to the interest

and naturalness of the narrative. That the slaughter, &c. at Laish was of the most horrible description is suggested—"There was no helper."

I. THOSE WHO SUBVERT THE PRINCIPLES OF MORALITY SHOULD NOT EXPECT TO BE TREATED ACCORDING TO THOSE PRINCIPLES.

II. HOWEVER APPARENTLY RELIGIOUS WRONG-DOERS ARE, THEIR CONDUCT DOES NOT LOSE ITS ESSENTIAL CHARACTER, AND WILL BE JUDGED. The record of the occurrence has preserved it for all time, and it is condemned before the bar of the righteous conscience.

III. THE GREATEST CARE SHOULD BE TAKEN AT THE FIRST INDICATION OF SCHISM OR ERROR, AS SUCH THINGS TEND TO PERPETUATE THEMSELVES. A regular priesthood is instituted, with its hereditary privileges and duties.

IV. THE REAL EFFECT OF SUCH RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS IS TO THE DETRIMENT OF TRUE RELIGION. The "house of gods" at Laish is a rival to the "house of God" at Shiloh. During those early days of Hebrew nationalisation and religious training, the mischief and hindrance occasioned by it must have been enormous. True religion is ever opposed in the world. Its worst foes are those who most nearly resemble it in outward ceremony, but whose motives are impure.—M.

Vers. 23, 24.—4. *The idolater's distress.* Micah has at one fell swoop lost gods and ephod and priest. As his chief gains and his fancied importance were derived from this source, he was desolate.

I. THOSE WHOSE TRUST IS IN OUTWARD THINGS, AND WHOSE HEART IS BOUND UP IN THEM, ARE EXPOSED TO GRAVE DANGERS AND DISADVANTAGES. The losses of life; the anxieties and dreads; bereavement. The religion of external details, how easily disarranged! The whole "establishment" may be swept away!

II. THE SPIRITUALLY-MINDED ARE FREED FROM THESE CARES, AND ALTHOUGH SUFFERING SIMILAR DEPRIVATIONS AND LOSSES, ARE NOT WITHOUT COMFORT. "God is a spirit, and they that worship him," &c. The heart that rests on Christ is secure against all outward perils. Forms, externals, &c. are not essential to true religion. The "means of grace" are not to become an end in themselves, and where the end is reached otherwise they can be dispensed with.—M.

Vers. 5.—*The religion of convenience.* I. MEN WHO ARE UNWILLING TO DO THE WILL OF GOD ARE SOMETIMES ANXIOUS TO SECURE HIS HELP. These Danites are little better than freebooters; they are determined to go their own way; they have no wish to be guided by God; they simply wish to be assured of success. So there are many who have sufficient religious faith to desire the blessing of God on their life, but not sufficient to submit to his guidance and authority. True loyalty to God will make us not merely consult him as to the success of our work, but as to its rightness, and not merely inquire whether the way in which we are determined to go shall prosper, but ask what way God would have us take.

II. THE PRAYER FOR PROSPERITY UNACCOMPANIED BY SUBMISSION TO GOD'S WILL DOES NOT JUSTIFY THE COURSE OF ACTION TO WHICH IT RELATES. We have superstitions about prayer. We are too ready to imagine that all is well if we have sought God's blessing upon our work. But we have only a right to ask for this when we are doing right. Prayer cannot sanctify a bad action. The Danites were not justified in their marauding expedition because they first consulted a supposed Divine oracle. Men seek God's blessing on their business while they conduct it dishonestly, on their country while they favour aggressive wars and national injustice, on their private lives while they pursue a worldly, perhaps even an immoral, course. Such conduct rather aggravates than mitigates guilt, because it betrays blindness of conscience in the searching light of God's presence.

III. AN ASSURANCE OF SUCCESS IS NO PROOF OF THE FAVOUR OF GOD. We are too ready to worship success as though it were a justification of the means by which it was attained. In this world, viewed from a human standpoint, goodness often fails and wickedness often succeeds. Our own feeling of assurance is no ground of reasonable confidence. They who are on the best of terms with themselves are not therefore on the best of terms with God. The timid, diffident, despondent soul may be really regarded with favour by God, while the vain, self-elated soul may be living

under his frown. The faith which saves is not self-confidence nor the assurance of success, but submissive and obedient trust in a Lord and Saviour.

IV. THEY WHO MAKE A CONVENIENCE OF RELIGION WILL FIND IN THE END THAT IT WILL BE THEIR CONDEMNING JUDGE. The priest told the Danites that their way was before the Lord. God would watch them. They had invoked his name. They would see ultimately what his presence involved. The recognition of God which is involved in seeking his blessing will increase our condemnation if we disregard his will.—A.

Vers. 19, 20 —*The mercenary priest.* Greed and ambition are the besetting sins of depraved priests. Both of these evil characteristics are apparent in Micah's Levite.

I. THE PRIESTLY OFFICE IS DEGRADED BY MERCENARY GREED. Micah had adopted the Levite when he was homeless and destitute, and had treated him with the kindness of a father to his son; yet as soon as he discovers a chance of better pay, the miserable man deserts and robs his patron. No man can serve God truly if the money wages of his service are the chief consideration with him. Though he may take such just payment as is given to him if he is God's faithful servant, he will, like the faithful Levites, feel that his real portion is the Eternal (Josh. xiii. 33). Such a man should also consider himself bound by ties of affection and friendly obligation to the people among whom he ministers. If he seeks promotion simply for the sake of pecuniary advantage, and irrespective of the loss which may be sustained in his present sphere, and of his possible unfitness for a larger sphere, he is guilty of gross worldliness and wicked selfishness.

II. THE PRIESTLY OFFICE IS DEGRADED BY SELFISH AMBITION. The Levite is tempted by the prospect of exercising his functions in a larger way as the priest of a tribe. Such an offer would only be possible in Israel under circumstances of religious decline and social disorder. Even then the Levite must have known that he was no priest at all according to the law of God, for he did not belong to the family of Aaron. But ambition tramples on law for its own advancement. Of course there are occasions when a man may naturally endeavour to rise in the world, and if he can be sure that he will extend his usefulness, it is his duty to do so. But—1. The opportunity of enlarged service elsewhere is no justification for unfaithfulness to our present service. Plainly the Levite was treating his benefactor with unpardonable ingratitude and treachery in deserting him for the service of the Danites. 2. It is only a culpable ambition which will lead a man to seek a higher position simply for his own honour and profit, and not for the good of those who are intrusted to his care. The priest exists for the people, not the people for the priest. But the latter condition has been only too apparent in the course of the corruptions of Christendom. Office has been sought solely for the satisfaction of the greed and ambition of the aspirant. How contrary to the teaching of Christ, who said, "Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your servant"! (Matt. xx. 27).—A.

Ver. 24.—*The lost gods.* Micah's distress at the loss of his gods and priest may be regarded on two sides—on the side of superstition and on that of genuine devotion.

I. THE SUPERSTITIOUS SIDE OF MICAH'S DISTRESS. 1. The god that can be stolen must be no true God. Micah should have seen the folly of his idolatry in the catastrophe which had befallen him. If the idols could not protect their own shrine, what could they do for their owner's home? 2. The man whose character is corrupt is worthless as a priest. Yet after the Levite had behaved in the vilest way Micah still felt the loss of him bitterly. This distress came from his superstitious belief in the efficacy of the residence of an official priest in his house, no matter what was the baseness of the man's character or the emptiness of his services. 3. A religion which depends on any material things or human offices for its efficacy is foreign to the character of the spiritual worship of the true God. It was a mistake for Micah to suppose that he would lose the presence of God by losing the images which he had made, or the blessing of God by losing his priest. Nothing that is done to a man's outside life can affect his religious blessings. God dwells in the shrine of the

heart. No persecution can rob us of his presence. The Waldenses in their mountain cave had lost every earthly comfort, but they had not lost God. God's blessings are not dependent on external ordinances, though these are the usual channels through which they flow. If we have no visible temple, altar, priest, or service, God can still bless us fully.

II. THE NATURAL SIDE OF MICAH'S DISTRESS. There is much in it which speaks well for Micah. Micah is a religious man. To him the loss of what he believes to be the source of religious blessings is a great trouble. Are not they who can lose the real presence of God in their hearts without any feeling of compunction far more astray than this man with all his idolatry and superstition? God is the light and life of the soul. How strange then that any should live without him and yet not know that anything "aileth" them! But whatever a man makes into a god for himself will interest him deeply. If he makes a god of his money, his art, his child, the loss of his god will plunge him into the darkness of despair. 1. Since we are thus deeply affected by the object of our supreme devotion, let us see that this is no earthly thing which can be stolen or destroyed, but the true, eternal God who will never leave us. 2. God sometimes takes from us the earthly treasures of which we have made gods that we may see the mistake of our idolatry, and so learn to lift up our hearts to the ever-abiding presence.—A.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XIX.

Ver. 1.—*When there was no king* (ch. xvii. 6; xviii. 1; xxi. 25). It appears from ch. xx. 27, 28 that the events narrated in these three last chapters of the Book of Judges happened in the lifetime of Phinehas, and while the ark was at Shiloh (see ch. xx. 27, note). Phinehas evidently outlived Joshua (Josh. xxiv. 29, 33), though there is no evidence to show how long. The events in these chapters must have occurred in the interval between the death of Joshua and the death of Phinehas. *A certain Levite, &c.* It is a curious coincidence that both the Levite whose sad story is here told, and the Levite the son of Gershom of whom we read in the preceding chapters, were sojourners in the hill country of Ephraim, and also closely connected with Bethlehem-judah. Perhaps the legitimate inference (see ver. 18, and ch. xx. 26, 27) is that in both cases the Levites were drawn to Ephraim by the ark being at Shiloh, and also that there was a colony of Levites at Bethlehem-judah. Whether there was any connection between the presence of Levites at Bethlehem and the annual sacrifice at Bethlehem which existed in David's time, and which argues the existence of a high place there, can only be a matter of conjecture (see 1 Sam. ix. 13, and xx. 29). All we can say is that there was the universal prevalence of high-place worship during the time of the judges, and that the services of Levites were sought after in connection with it (ch. xvii. 18). *On the side.* Hebrew, *sides*. In the masculine form the word means the hip and upper part of the thigh; in the feminine, as here, it is applied only to inanimate objects, as a house,

the temple, a cave, the north, a pit, a country, &c., and is used in the dual number (see 1 Sam. xxiv. 4; 1 Kings vi. 16; Ps. xlviii. 3; cxviii. 8; Isa. xxxvii. 24; Ezek. xxxii. 23, &c.). It means the innermost, hindmost, furthestmost parts. Its application here to the northern side of Ephraim seems to imply that the writer wrote in the south, probably in Judah. *A concubine.* An inferior wife, who had not the same right for herself or for her children as the *wife* had (see Gen. xxv. 6).

Ver. 2.—*Played the whore, &c.* Perhaps the phrase only means that she revolted from him and left him. Her returning to her father's house, and his anxiety to make up the quarrel, both discourage taking the phrase in its worst sense. *Four whole months.* Literally, *days, four months*; meaning either *a year and four months*, as in 1 Sam. xxvii. 7, where, however, the *and* is expressed; or *days* (i. e. many days), viz., *four months*. For the use of *days* for a *year* see Exod. xiii. 10; Judges xvii. 10, &c.

Ver. 3.—*To bring her again.* So the Keri. But the Cethib has *to bring him, i. e. it, again*, viz., her heart. But the phrase *to speak to her heart* is such a common one for *to speak friendly or kindly* to any one that it is not likely that it should here be used otherwise, so that the pronoun should refer to *heart*. If the masculine is here the right reading, it may be an archaism making the suffix of the common gender like the plural suffix in ver. 24, which is masculine, though applied to women, and like the masculine pronoun itself, which is so used throughout the Pentateuch and elsewhere (see also ch. xxi. 12; Exod. i. 21). *A couple of asses.* One for himself and one for her. *He rejoiced.* No

doubt, in part at least, because the expense of his daughter's maintenance would be transferred from himself to his daughter's husband.

Ver. 4.—**Retained him.** See the same phrase 2 Kings iv. 8, where it is rendered *she constrained him*. The full phrase is in Gen. xxi. 18, *hold him in thy hand*.

Ver. 5.—**Comfort thine heart, &c.** Compare Gen. xviii. 5.

Ver. 6.—**For the damsel's father had said, &c., or rather, And the damsel's father said.** He had not at first intended to stay on, but to go on his way after he had eaten and drunk (ver. 5). But when they had prolonged their carousal, the father of the damsel persuaded him to stay on another night.

Ver. 7.—**He lodged there again.** Literally, *he returned and lodged there*. The Septuagint and one Hebrew MS. read, *And he tarried and lodged there*.

Ver. 8.—**And they tarried.** It should rather be rendered in the imperative mood: *And tarry ye until the afternoon. So they did eat both of them.* The imperative *comfort thine heart* is in the singular because only the man and the father-in-law are represented throughout as *eating and drinking both of them together*. The imperative *tarry ye* is in the plural because it applies to the wife as well as the man.

Ver. 9.—**Draweth toward evening.** The Hebrew phrase, which is uncommon, is, *The day is slackening to become evening*, i. e. the heat and the light of the day are becoming slack and weak, and evening is coming on. *The day groweth to an end.* Another unusual phrase; literally, *Behold the declining of the day*, or, as some render it, *the encamping of the day*, as if the sun after his day's journey was now pitching his tent for the night. *Go home.* Literally, *to thy tent*, as in ch. xx. 8. So the phrase, *To your tents, O Israel*, means, *Go home* (see 1 Kings xii. 16, &c.).

Ver. 10.—**Jebus.** See ch. i. 21, note. Jerusalem is numbered among Joshua's conquests at Josh. x. 23; xii. 10. But from this verse it would appear that the Israelite population had withdrawn and left the city to be entirely occupied by the Jebusites, who held it till the time of David (2 Sam. v. 6). Jerusalem is only about two hours from Bethlehem.

Ver. 12.—**Gibeah** (or ha-Gibeah, the hill). In the tribe of Benjamin (Josh. xviii. 28); Saul's birthplace. Its modern name is *Jeba*. It would be about two and a half hours' further journey from Jerusalem.

Ver. 13.—**Ramah** (ha-Ramah, the height). Now er-Râm, less than an hour's journey from Gibeah, both being about equidistant from Jerusalem.

Ver. 15.—**A street of the city.** Rather, JUDGES.

the broad space or place near the gate, such as is usual in an Oriental city (cf. Ruth iv. 1). **There was no man that took them into his house.** This absence of the common rites of hospitality toward strangers was a sign of the degraded character of the men of Gibeah (see Gen. xviii. 3-8; xix. 2, 3; Rom. xii. 13; Heb. xiii. 2; 1 Pet. iv. 9).

Ver. 16.—**Which was also of mount Ephraim.** The Hebrew is, *And the man was from the hill country of Ephraim*. It does not mean that he also, as well as the Levite, was from Ephraim.

Ver. 18.—**The side of mount Ephraim.** See ver. 1, note. *I am going to the house of the Lord*, i. e. to the tabernacle at Shiloh. But some translate the words *I frequent, am conversant with, walk in*, the house of the Lord, i. e. am a Levite. But the former seems the best rendering on the whole.

Ver. 19.—**Yet there is both straw, &c.,** i. e. he only wanted shelter, he had all his provisions with him, it was but little that he asked for, and yet no man would take him in.

Ver. 20.—**They washed their feet.** See Gen. xviii. 4; xix. 2; Luke vii. 34; 1 Tim. v. 10, &c.

Ver. 22.—**Making their hearts merry—** as in vers. 6, 9, and in ch. xvi. 25; Ruth iii. 7. But there is nothing in the expression implying any excess in drinking. **Bring forth the man.** The abandoned character of the men appears in this, that not only did they offer no hospitality to the stranger themselves, but were ready to violate the sanctity of the hospitality of the old man's house by their brutal violence. There must have been a fearful absence of all law and order and government when such deeds could be done without any interference on the part of magistrate or elder or ruler of any kind. The singular resemblance of the whole narrative to that in Gen. xix. suggests that the Israelites by their contact with the accursed Canaanites had reduced themselves to the level of Sodom and Gomorrah. Surely this shows the wisdom of the command to destroy utterly the workers of abomination. **Sons of Belial.** See ch. xx. 13, where the same Hebrew phrase is rendered *children of Belial*. Belial in this common phrase is not a proper name, but a noun meaning *worthlessness*. Sons or men of Belial means worthless fellows.

Ver. 23.—**He pleads the sanctity of hospitality.**

Ver. 25.—**The man took his concubine, &c.** One's blood boils at such selfish baseness and such cowardly cruelty. It is not quite clear whether the man means the Levite or the old Ephraimite.

Ver. 26.—**Till it was light, or, as the words may mean, at daylight.**

Ver. 27.—*The woman was fallen down at the door, &c.* Poor thing! with her last breath she turned to the house where he was who should have been her protector, but who had deserted her in her hour of need.

Ver. 29.—Compare 1 Sam. xi. 8.

Ver. 30.—*And it was so, &c.* Some translate this verse quite differently. They understand the whole verse as what the Levite said when he sent the twelve pieces of the murdered woman to the twelve tribes,

as thus: "*He sent her into all the coasts of Israel* (ver. 29), saying, *It shall come to pass that all who see it will say, There hath been nothing done and nothing seen like this from the day, &c.* But the A. V. makes very good sense, and the Hebrew will bear it. Consider of it, &c. The general sense of the whole nation was to call a national council to decide what to do. The Levite had succeeded in arousing the indignation of the twelve tribes to avenge his terrible wrong.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—30.—*The downward progress.* It is certainly not without a purpose that we have in Holy Scripture from time to time exhibitions of sin in its most repulsive and revolting forms. The general rule which tells us that "it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret" is, as it were, violated on these occasions, because it is more important that the depravity of which human nature is capable at its worst should be revealed, than that the blush of shame should be prevented by its concealment. Sin, in some of its forms, is so disguised, and toned down, and softened, that the natural mind of man does not shrink from it with abhorrence, or perceive its deadly nature, or its fatal consequences. But it is essential that sin should be known to be what it is, and especially that it should be made clear by what *gradual descents* a man may glide from one stage of wickedness to another, till, under favouring circumstances, he reaches a depth of vileness which at one time would have seemed impossible. The process by which this descent is reached is not difficult to trace. There is in every man a certain moral sense which restrains him from the commission of certain acts, whether of falsehood, dishonesty, cruelty, injustice, sensuality, or any other form of sin. And while that moral sense is maintained in its vigour, such acts may appear to him impossible for him to commit. But this moral sense is weakened, and more or less broken down, by every action done in contradiction to its authority. At each successive stage of descent there is a less shock to the weakened moral sense by the aspect of such or such sins than there was at the preceding stage. The sin appears less odious, and the resisting power is less strong. It is very true that in many instances, even after the moral sense is broken down, the force of public opinion, the sense of a man's own interests, habit, the authority of the law, and other causes external to a man's self, operate to keep him within certain bounds, and to restrain him from certain excesses of unrighteousness. But, on the other hand, it may and often does happen that these counteracting causes are not in operation. A man is placed in a society where public opinion countenances vice, where he does not seem to be in danger of any loss in reputation or in fortune by the basest acts of villainy, where the authority of law is in abeyance, and, in a word, where there is no barrier but the fear of God and his own moral sense to restrain him from the lowest depths of wickedness. Then the melancholy transition from light to darkness takes place without let or hindrance. Self-respect, honour, decency, kind feeling towards others, reverence for mankind, justice, shame, burn gradually with a dimmer and a dimmer light within, and finally the last spark of the light of humanity goes out, and leaves nothing but the horror of a great darkness, in which no crime or wickedness shocks, and no struggle of the conscience is kept up. The men of Gibeah had reached this fearful depth. Not suddenly, we may be sure, for *nemo repente fuit turpissimus*; but by a gradual downward progress. There must have been for them a time when God's mighty acts by the Red Sea, in the wilderness, in the wars of Canaan, were fresh in their thoughts, or in their, or their parents', memories. The great name of Joshua, the living example of Phinehas, the traditions of the surviving elders, must have set before them a standard of righteousness, and impressed them with a sense of being the people of God. But they had not acted up to their high calling. Doubtless they had mingled with the heathen and learnt their works. Their hearts had declined from God, from his fear and service. Idolatry had eaten as a canker into their moral principle. Its shameful

licentiousness had enticed and overcome them. The Spirit of God was vexed within them. The light of his word was quenched in the darkness of a gross materialism. Utter callousness of conscience came on. They began to sneer at virtue, and to scoff at the fear of God. When the fear of God was gone, the honour due to man and due to themselves would soon go too. And thus it came to pass at the time of this history that the whole community was sunk to the level of the vilest heathenism. Hospitality to strangers, though those strangers were their own flesh and blood, there was none; pity for the homeless and weary, though one of them was a woman, there was none either; respect for neighbours and fellow-townsmen, common decency and humanity, and every feeling which distinguishes a man from a wild beast or a devil, had wholly left their vile breasts, and, people of God as they were by privilege and covenant, they were in their abandonedness wholly the children of the devil. The example thus recorded with unflinching truth is needed for our generation. The Israelites were separated from God by abominable idolatries. The attempt of our age is to separate men from God by a blasphemous denial of his Being. The result is the same, however it may be arrived at. Let the fear of God be once extinct in the human breast, and reverence for man and for a man's own nature will inevitably perish too. Virtue cannot survive godliness. The spirit of man is fed by the Spirit of God. Extinguish the spiritual, and nothing of man remains but the corrupt flesh. And man without spirit is no man at all. It is in the cultivation of spiritual affections, in the constant strengthening of the moral sense, in steady resistance to the first beginnings of sin, and in steadfast cleaving to God, that man's safety lies. It is in the maintenance of religion that the safety of society consists. Without the fear of God man would soon become a devil, and earth would become a hell.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 1.—Cf. on ch. xviii. 1—13.—M.

Vers. 4—10.—*Troublesome hospitality.* There is no more vivid picture of this extravagance. The Levite is delayed beyond all his reckoning, and perhaps through this is exposed to the evils subsequently narrated. There is a latent purpose betrayed by the anxiety of his host, which robs the offer of its simplicity and true hospitality. Like all who simulate a virtue for other than the mere love of it, he oversteps the bounds of modesty and decorum, and becomes an inconvenience instead of a help.

I. TRUE HOSPITALITY SHOULD BE FOR THE SAKE OF THE GUEST, AND NOT THE HOST.

II. EXCESS OF HOSPITALITY MAY ENTAIL INCONVENIENCE AND WRONG UPON OUR GUEST.

III. WHERE HOSPITALITY IS OFFERED FOR SOME EXTRINSIC PURPOSE, IT LOSES ITS TRUE CHARACTER.

IV. CHRIST THE GRAND EXAMPLE OF THE HOST. His moderation; careful calculation as to needs of his guests; fulness of human sympathy; impartation of spiritual grace to the humbler viands.—M.

Vers. 14—21.—*Exceptional hospitality.* How welcome! Few of us but have at some time or other been belated in a strange place. We know nobody, and perhaps the people are reserved and suspicious. In such a case one friend, the only one, and, like this man, depending upon daily work for daily bread, becomes of inestimable service. The feeling of homelessness would be deepened in the case of the Levite when he recalled the good cheer from which he had come.

I. THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN STRANGERS THEMSELVES ARE BEST ABLE TO SYMPATHISE WITH STRANGERS. "He *sojourned* in Gibeah."

II. THE POOR ARE OFTEN MORE HOSPITABLE THAN THE RICH. Their occupation often introduces them to persons in distress. "What would the poor do if it were not for the poor?" Simplicity of life tends to cultivate true sympathy.

III. THERE IS NO PLACE SO WICKED AND UNLOVING AS TO BE WITHOUT SOME WITNESS TO TRUTH AND GOODNESS. What a hell this Gibeah! Yet in it was one "like

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unto the Son of man." What judgments he may have averted from its guilty inhabitants! Exceptional piety like this is no accidental thing; still less can it be the product of surrounding social influences. There are many ways in which we may serve our fellows, if the love of God be in our hearts. Perhaps the people thought him eccentric; many would despise him as poor and a stranger; but he was the one man who did God's work at a time when it sorely needed to be done. Shall not such hospitality be remembered in the kingdom? "I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in," &c. (Matt. xxv. 35, 40).—M.

Ver. 30.—*Unparalleled crime: the spirit and method in which its problems are to be met* The narrative of the book has been gradually deepening in tragic interest and moral importance; it now reaches its climax. The sentence which the people themselves passed upon this crime is repeated, that public inquiry may be directed to the significance of it, to the causes of its production, and the means for preventing the recurrence of similar enormities. To the author the unity of the nation, publicly represented in the tabernacle at Shiloh and the throne of the new kingdom, as the outward symbols of theocratic government, is the grand specific, and the proof of this may be said to be the dogmatic purpose of his work. Studying the same problem in its modern illustrations, we are carried onward to a deeper and more radical cause, and, consequently, to the need of a more potent and inward influence of restraint and salvation. But do we study sufficiently, from the higher philosophic and religious standpoint, the great crimes that startle us from day to day? Would it not be a "means of grace," by no means to be despised were we to grapple with the spiritual and practical bearings of such occurrences? There could not well be a more judicious course in such events than that advised by the writer. It is terse, natural, philosophic.

I. PERSONAL MEDITATION. "*Consider it.*" In all its relations; our own as well as others. Let it show us the measure of public declension in morals and religion. Ask what neglect in the matter of education, social fellowship, or religious teaching and influence will account for it. How far am I as an individual in sympathy with the ideas, customs, and whole cast of public life in my time? How far am I my brother's keeper? Can anything be done to rouse the public conscience to a keener and more influential activity? How easy or how difficult would a similar crime be to myself? Prayers that I may be kept from such a thing, and may lead others into a better way.

II. CONSULTATION. Not at random, but of persons qualified to advise. The deliberations of the "Prisoners' Aid Society" would furnish a model for practical discussion. But "statistics" will never solve the problem. It is a question of human depravity, and a general repentance and alarmed attention is needed.

III. JUDGMENT. A careful, mature, well-informed and advised opinion; but, *as being the opinion of the nation, it must be carried into effect.* Something must be done, as well as thought. How valuable and influential such a judgment! It carries within itself the seeds of reformation and the conditions of recovery.—M.

Vers. 16—21.—*Hospitality.* I. THOUGH MEN WHO ARE ABANDONED TO SINFUL PLEASURES MAY DELIGHT IN THE SOCIETY OF BOON COMPANIONS, THEY WILL SHOW THEMSELVES WANTING IN THE GENEROSITY OF TRUE HOSPITALITY. The men of Gibeah would unite in seeming friendliness for riotous wickedness; but they were wanting in the almost universal Eastern kindness to the stranger. The intemperate and vicious may appear to be more generous in their boisterous freedom than persons of more strict habits; but they are too selfish for real generosity. Self-indulgence is essentially selfish; vice is naturally morose.

II. WE SHOULD ENDEAVOUR TO DO RIGHT, THOUGH THIS MAY BE CONTRARY TO THE EXAMPLE OF OUR NEIGHBOURS. The old man was shocked at the inhospitality of the men of Gibeah. He was not a native of the place, and though he may have lived there long, he retained the kinder habits of his native home. When at Rome we are not to do as Rome does if this is clearly wrong. Englishmen abroad may find it difficult to resist the bad social influences of foreign towns; but if they are Christians

they will feel that the universal prevalence of a bad custom is no justification for their adoption of it. Yet how difficult it is to see our duty when this is contrary to the habits of the society in which we live, and how much more difficult to be independent and firm in performing it!

III. KINDNESS TO STRANGERS IS A DUTY OBLIGATORY UPON ALL OF US. The graphic picture of the old man returning from his work in the fields at even and taking note of the houseless strangers is the one relieving feature in the terrible story of that night's doings. Modern and Western habits may modify the form of our hospitality, but they cannot exonerate us from the duty to show similar kindness under similar circumstances. From the mythical gentleman who excused himself for not saving a drowning man because he had not been introduced to him, to the Yorkshire native, who, seeing a strange face in his hamlet, cried, "Let's heave a brick at him!" how common it is for people to limit their kindness to persons of their acquaintance! The parable of the good Samaritan teaches us that any one who needs our help is our neighbour (Luke x. 29—37).

IV. KINDNESS TO STRANGERS MAY BE REWARDED BY THE DISCOVERY OF UNKNOWN TIES OF FRIENDSHIP. The old man finds that the Levite comes from his own part of the country. Doubtless he was thus able to hear tidings of old acquaintances. The world is not so large as it appears. The stranger is often nearer to us than we suspect. Though true hospitality expects no return (Luke xiv. 12—14), it may find unlooked-for reward in newly-discovered friendly associations.—A.

Vers. 22—28.—*Monstrous wickedness.* Now and again the world is horrified by the news of some frightful atrocity before which ordinary sin looks almost virtuous. How is such wickedness possible?

I. MONSTROUS WICKEDNESS IS A FRUIT OF SELFISHNESS. The men of Gibeah were abandoned to gross self-indulgence till they utterly ignored the rights and sufferings of others. Nothing is so cruelly selfish as the degradation of that most unselfish affection love. When selfish pleasure is the one motive of conduct, men are blinded in conscience more than by any other influence.

II. MONSTROUS WICKEDNESS IS ATTAINED THROUGH SUCCESSIVE DEGREES OF DEPRAVITY. No man suddenly falls from innocence to gross licentiousness and heartless cruelty. The first step is slight; each following step seems but a small increase of sin, till the bottom of the very pit of iniquity is reached almost unconsciously. If the wicked man could have foreseen the depth of his fall from the first he would not have believed it possible. Men should beware of the first step downward.

III. MONSTROUS WICKEDNESS IS MOST ADVANCED IN THE SOCIETY OF MANY BAD MEN. As fire burns most when drawn together, vice is most inflamed when men are companions in wickedness. Each tempts the rest by his example. Guilt appears to be lessened by being shared. Men excuse their conduct by comparing it with that of their neighbours. Thus the greatest depravity is most often seen in cities—in the concourse of many men. In the excitement of a mob men will commit excesses from which they would shrink in solitary action. Yet responsibility is still individual, and each man must ultimately answer for his own sins.

IV. MONSTROUS WICKEDNESS IS MADE POSSIBLE BY THE VERY GREATNESS OF MAN'S NATURE. Human nature has a wide range of capacities. Man can rise infinitely above the brute, and he can fall infinitely below the brute. He can rise to the angelic, he can fall to the devilish. His originality of imagination, power of inventiveness, and freedom of will open to him avenues of evil as well as pathways of good which are closed to the more dull life of the animal world. The greater the capacity of the instrument, the more horrible is the discord which results from its getting out of tune. Those men who have the highest genius have the faculty for the worst sin. So tremendous is the capacity of the soul both for good and for evil, that the wise and humble man, fearing to trust it alone to the temptations of life, will learn to "commit it to the keeping of a faithful Creator" (1 Pet. iv. 19).—A.

Ver. 30.—*The duty of considering painful subjects.* I. IT IS WRONG FOR THE CHURCH TO IGNORE THE WICKEDNESS OF THE WORLD. The Church is not at liberty to enjoy the flowers and fruits of her "little garden walled around" to the neglect

of the waste howling wilderness outside. She has no right to shut her eyes to the world's sin while she dreams fair dreams of the ultimate perfection of mankind. A good deal of foolish optimism is talked by people who will not take the trouble to inquire into the real state of society. That is a false fastidiousness which refuses to take note of dark subjects because they are revolting and contaminating. True purity will be shocked not simply at the knowledge of evil, but more at the existence of it, and will find expression not merely in shunning the sight of it, but in actively overcoming it. Such action, however, can only be taken after the evil has been recognised. It is, therefore, the work of the Church to consider seriously the fearful evils of profligacy, intemperance, and social corruption generally. The duty of contemplating heavenly things is no excuse for ignoring the evil of the world, which it is our express duty to enlighten and purify by means of the gospel of Christ.

II. MONSTROUS WICKEDNESS SHOULD EXCITE DEEP AND SERIOUS CONSIDERATION. It is easy to be indignant. But the hasty passion of indignation may do more harm than good. It may strike in the wrong place; it may only touch superficial symptoms and leave the root of the evil; and it is likely to die down as quickly as it springs up. Great sins should be visited not with the rage of vindictiveness, but with grave, severe justice. We should "consider and take advice," reflect, consult, discuss the cause and the remedy. Undisciplined human nature will express horror and seek revenge at the revelation of a great crime. It wants Christian thoughtfulness and a deep, sad conviction of duty to practise self-restraint in the moment of indignation, and to investigate the painful subject with care after the interest of a temporary excitement has flagged.

III. IT IS OUR DUTY TO SPEAK OUT AND TAKE ACTION IN RELATION TO PAINFUL SUBJECTS WHEN ANYTHING CAN BE DONE TO EFFECT AN IMPROVEMENT. Evils are allowed to go unchecked because a false modesty dreads to speak of them. The men and women who overcome this and bravely advocate unpopular questions should be treated with all honour by the Christian Church. If the Christian does nothing to check the vicious practices and corrupt institutions which surround him, he becomes responsible for their continued existence.—A.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XX.

Ver. 1. *Went out, i. e.* from their several homes to the place of meeting. The congregation. The technical term (not, however, found in Samuel and Kings, except in 1 Kings xii. 20) for the whole Israelitish people (Exod. xii. 3; xvi. 1, 2, 9; Levit. iv. 15; Josh. xviii. 1, &c.). From Dan to Beersheba. Dan, or Laish (ch. xviii. 29), being the northernmost point, and Beersheba (now *Bir-es-saba*, the springs so called) in the south of Judah the southernmost. It cannot be inferred with certainty from this expression that the Danite occupation of Laish had taken place at this time, though it may have done so, because we do not know when this narrative was written, and the phrase is only used as a proverbial expression familiar in the writer's time. The land of Gilead. In its widest sense, meaning the whole of trans-Jordanic Israel (see ch. x. 8; xi. 1, &c.). *Mizpeh*, or, as it is always written in Hebrew, *ham-Mizpeh*, with the article (see ch. xxi. 1). The Mizpeh here mentioned is not the same as the Mizpeh of ch. x. 17; xi. 11, 29, 34, which was in Gilead, but was situated in the tribe of Benjamin (Josh. xviii. 26). That it

was a national place of meeting in the time of Samuel is clear from 1 Sam. vii. 5—12, and we learn from ver. 16 of that same chapter that it was one of the places to which Samuel went on circuit. We find it a place of national meeting also in 1 Sam. x. 17, and even so late as 2 Kings xxv. 23, and in the time of the Maccabees (1 Macc. iii. 46). Its vicinity to Shiloh, where the tabernacle was, was probably one reason why it was made a centre to the whole congregation (see especially 1 Sam. x. 17, 22, 26). Its exact site is not known with certainty, but it is thought to be that of *Nebi Samuil*, from which Jerusalem is seen at about two hours' distance to the south-east. Unto the Lord, *i. e.* in the presence of the tabernacle, which was doubtless brought there, on so solemn an occasion, from Shiloh (cf. Exod. xxxiv. 34; Levit. i. 8; Judges xi. 11; xxi. 2, and ver. 26 of this chapter).

Ver. 2.—The chief. The word here used means the *corner-stones* of a building. Hence it is applied to the chief men, who, as it were, bind and keep together the whole people. Their presence at this great meeting is mentioned to show that it was a regularly constituted assembly of all Israel. The same

phrase occurs 1 Sam. xiv. 38, and Isa. xix. 13 (*the stay of the tribes*, A. V.). The numbers (400,000) are of course those of the whole congregation. The assembly of the people of God. So, Numb. xvi. 3; xx. 4, Israel is called *the congregation of the Lord*; and Neh. xiii. 1, *the congregation of God*. Not dissimilar was the first great council of the Church, consisting of the Church (*ἐκκλησία*, i. e. the assembly of disciples) and the apostles and elders (who were the corner-stones, the *lapides angulares*, thereof). See Acts xv. 4, 6, 12. **Four hundred thousand.** See ver. 17. The enumeration in the wilderness gave 603,550 (Numb. ii. 32; xi. 21), and at the second numbering 601,730 (Numb. xxvi. 51). In 1 Sam. xi. 8 a general assembly of the whole people, summoned by sending a piece of the flesh of a yoke of oxen "throughout all the coasts of Israel," amounted to 330,000. David's numbering gave of Israel 800,000, and of Judah 500,000, in all 1,300,000; but these were not assembled together, but numbered at their own homes. Jehoshaphat's men of war amounted to 1,160,000 according to 2 Chron. xvii. 14—18. In the time of Amaziah there were of Judah alone 300,000 men able to go forth to war (2 Chron. xxiv. 6).

Ver. 3.—**The children of Benjamin heard, &c.** This seems to be mentioned to show that the absence of the Benjamites from the national council was not from ignorance, but from contumacy. **Tell us, &c.** This was addressed to all whom it might concern. The Levites answered.

Ver. 5.—**And thought to have slain me.** This was so far true that it is likely he was in fear of his life; but he doubtless shaped his narrative so as to conceal his own cowardice in the transaction. We have a similar example of an unfaithful narration of facts in the letter of Claudius Lysias to Felix (Acts xxiii. 27). **The men of Gibeah.** *The masters*, as in ch. ix. 2, meaning the citizens.

Ver. 7.—**Ye are all children of Israel.** He appeals to them as men bound to wipe away the shame and disgrace of their common country. He speaks with force and dignity under the sense of a grievous wrong and a crushing sorrow.

Ver. 8.—**The people**—with the emphatic meaning of *the whole people of Israel*, the assembly of the people of God, as in ver. 2. **As one man.** There was but one resolve, and one sentiment, and one expression of opinion, in that vast multitude. Not one would go home till due punishment had been inflicted upon Gibeah of Benjamin. **To his tent, i. e. home**, as in ch. ix. 9.

Ver. 9.—**We will go up by lot against it.** The words *we will go up* are not in the Hebrew, but are supplied by the Septuagint, who very likely found in their Hebrew copy

the word *na'aleh*, we will go up, which has since (perchance) fallen out of the Hebrew text from its resemblance to the following word *'aleha* against it. The sense will then be, Not one of us will shrink from the dangers of the war; but we will cast lots who shall go up against Gibeah, and who shall be employed in collecting victuals for the army, 40,000 having to be told off for the latter service. And exactly in the same spirit (if indeed the answer was not actually given by lot) they inquired of the Lord who should go up first (in ver. 18), and, we may presume also, who should follow in the subsequent attacks, though this is omitted for brevity. Others, however, think the words *against it by lot* are purposely abrupt, and that the meaning is that Israel would deal with Gibeah as they had done with the Canaanites, viz., destroy their city, and divide its territory by lot among the other tribes, after the analogy of Josh. xviii. 8—10. But this interpretation is not borne out by what actually happened, nor is the phrase a likely one to have been used.

Ver. 12.—**Tribe of Benjamin.** The Hebrew has *tribes*, meaning probably *families*, as the word is used Numb. iv. 18. *Vice versâ*, *family* is used for *tribe*, ch. xvii. 7; xviii.

11. **What wickedness, &c.** The message was perhaps too sharp and peremptory to be successful. It roused the pride and tribal independence of the Benjamites to resist. We must suppose the message to have preceded in point of time the hostile gathering recorded in ver. 11. It was probably sent before the council broke up (see above, ch. vii. 25; viii. 4, and note).

Ver. 13.—**Children of Belial.** See ch. xix. 22, note. There seems to be a reference here to Deut. xiii. 12—15.

Ver. 14.—**But the children of Benjamin.** It should be *And the children*, &c. It is not dependent upon the preceding verse, but begins a new head of the narrative. **From the cities, i. e.** the different cities of the tribe of Benjamin, enumerated in Josh. xviii. 21—28, twenty-six in number.

Ver. 15.—**Twenty and six thousand.** The numbers of Benjamin in the wilderness were at the first numbering 35,400, and at the second 45,600 (Numb. i. 36; ii. 23; xxvi. 41). It is impossible to account with certainty for the falling off in the numbers by so many as near 20,000; but perhaps many were slain in the wars of Canaan, and the unsettled times were unfavourable to early marriages. For the whole of Israel there was, as appeared by ver. 2, note, a falling off of nearly 200,000 men, or, to speak exactly (601,730—400,000 + 26,700), of 175,030. **Which were numbered.** There is some obscurity in this latter clause; but, in spite of the accents being opposed to it, the A. V. seems certainly right.

The rendering according to the accents, "they (the Benjamites) were numbered, besides the inhabitants of Gibeah, seven hundred chosen men," makes no sense, and does not explain who the 700 were. The population of Gibeah would be about 5×700 , i. e. 3500, according to this statement.

Ver. 16.—Seven hundred . . men left-handed. It is curious that the tribe of Benjamin, which means *son of the right hand*, should have this peculiar institution of a corps of left-handed men. Ehud the Ben-

jamite was a *man left-handed* (ch. iii. 15; see also 1 Chron. xii. 2). The Roman name *Scævola* means *left-handed*. For the use of the sling see 1 Sam. xvii. 40, 49. Diodorus Siculus (quoted by Rosenmüller) mentions the remarkable skill of the inhabitants of the Balearic Islands in the use of the sling, adding, in terms very similar to those of the text, that they seldom miss their aim.

Ver. 17.—A repetition of the statement in ver. 2.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—17.—*Temper*. It is impossible to suppose that the whole tribe of Benjamin really sympathised with the foul deed of the men of Gibeah, or could have felt otherwise than that such a deed deserved the severest punishment that could be inflicted. We must seek the cause, therefore, of their desperate resistance to the just decree of the nation in some other motive than that of consent to their brethren's "lewdness and folly." Nor is such motive far to seek. We find it in that unreasonable movement of human pride and selfishness which we commonly call *temper*; a movement which sets up a man's own dignity, self-importance, self-will, self-esteem, above the laws of God, above righteousness, justice, truth, and the law of kindness, and yet so blinds him, that in vindication of his own dignity he does the most foolish and degrading actions, lowering himself where he sought to raise himself, making himself ridiculous where he thought to be an object of superior respect. Let us analyse the case of the Benjamites. Had the men of Gibeah belonged to the tribe of Ephraim or Judah, they would no doubt have been forward to join in their punishment. Their natural perceptions of right and wrong, their right feelings of the dishonour done to the whole congregation of Israel, the congregation of God, and of the profanation of the holy name of Jehovah, would have led them to wipe out the stain by the punishment of the offenders. But because the offenders were Benjamites, immediately all these right feelings were stifled, and in their stead the one selfish feeling that Benjamin would be dishonoured among the tribes, and that they themselves would be degraded in their fellow-tribesmen's shame, was allowed to prevail. Their pride was wounded and their temper was up. Possibly they had not been properly consulted in the first instance; possibly the message sent to them was too peremptory and haughty; possibly the other tribes, in their just indignation, had scarcely treated them with the deference due to brethren; and if so, this was fresh fuel added to the flame of temper. But the result was that they were incapable of right feeling or of right judgment; that they were blind to what duty and self-interest alike required of them; and that, under the guidance of temper and stubborn pride, they rushed on to their own destruction, braving the wrath of a body nearly sixteen times as powerful as themselves, and withal tarnishing their own reputation by identifying themselves with the basest villainy. We see exactly the same results of temper on a smaller scale every day around us. Men will not do the right thing, or the just thing, or the wise thing, not because they are wicked and unjust and destitute of good sense under ordinary circumstances, but because their tempers are up. Their false pride blinds and enslaves them. They see a personal humiliation in the way of acting rightly; their resentment against individuals for insult or wrong done to them stiffens their necks and hardens their will. If doing right will please them, or promote their interests, they had rather do wrong. They will not do anything they ask, or submit to any of their demands, however just they may be in themselves. And as for their own interests, and even their own good name, they are ready to sacrifice them at the imperious bidding of temper. Much of human unhappiness is caused by temper, which is as injurious to the peace of those who yield to its dictates as to those who are exposed to its outbreaks. It ought not to exist, certainly not to have dominion, in any Christian breast. Fellowship with the cross of Christ is the great help in subduing human pride. As real humility grows,

as the mind which was in Christ Jesus is more perfectly formed within, as the old man is crucified with Christ, and the desire to do the perfect will of God displaces more and more the self-will, and the glory of God becomes more entirely the aim sought, in lieu of self-glorification, the dominion of temper becomes enfeebled, till, like a flickering flame, it goes out, and is still before the rising power of the Holy Spirit of God.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 1.—*National atonement.* There are times when a nation is stirred to its depths. Its consciousness is then a religious one. A solemn unity of sentiment pervades it, and prevails over all lesser differences. It is then ready and effective as the servant of the Lord. Observe—

I. THE UNIFYING INFLUENCES. 1. *A common detestation of the crime.* 2. *A common danger.* 3. *The Spirit of Jehovah.*

II. THE MEASURE DETERMINED ON. *By the council of the nation.* 1. *Immediate punishment of the criminals.* 2. *Failing their delivery, the punishment of those who protected them and condoned their wickedness.*—M.

Ver. 11.—*Union.* I. THE NATURE OF UNION. 1. This implies *conjunction*. The individuality of the parts is not destroyed when these are united. Each of the separate stones retains its shape after it is built into the common structure, and the union is formed by cementing all close together. So union amongst men does not destroy the personality and character of each man, but, instead of acting separately, men in union act in common. 2. This implies *harmony*. Conjunction without harmony brings not union, but confusion, and the nearer the conjunction, the fiercer is the internal conflict. Thus civil war is more cruel than war with a foreign nation, family feuds more bitter than quarrels with strangers. Harmony implies diversity, but agreement, as the several stones in a building, though each may be different in shape and size from others, fit in together, and fit the better because they are not all alike. 3. This implies the *subordination of the individual to the whole*. So far there may be a partial suppression of individuality; but in the end this develops a higher individuality. The several organs of the body are made not to exercise their functions for their own sakes, but for the good of the whole body. Yet this differentiation of parts allows of the more full development of each organ, and so leads to a more complete individuality in its form and character. When men are working under a social system, each is able to contribute his part to the good of the whole by a more free exercise of his own special talents than would be possible in a condition of isolation.

II. THE ADVANTAGES OF UNION. 1. Union increases *strength*. There is not only the gross force resulting from the addition of the units of force; there is a multiplication of strength, an economy of power. The nation can do as a whole what all its citizens could not do if acting separately. The Church can accomplish work for Christ which private Christians would fail to do. 2. Union promotes *peace*. When men are knit together as one they forget their private differences. Though we cannot attain the peace of uniformity, we should aim at securing the peace of harmony. 3. Union favours *growth and development*. Israel suffered from her disintegration. Her national unification was requisite for any solid advance of civilisation. This development of harmonised and organised union distinguishes civilised nations from savage tribes. As the Church learns to think more of common Christian charity than of narrow sectarian differences, she will advance in likeness to the mind of Christ and in the enjoyment of the graces and blessings of the gospel.

III. THE GROUNDS OF UNION. Men need some cause to draw them together—some common ground of union. 1. This may be found in a great wrong to be removed. A fearful crime stirred the hearts of all Israel. In presence of this the tribes forgot their minor grievances. Should not the great sin of the world be a call to Christians to sink their ceaseless quarrels in one united effort to destroy it with the power of Christ's truth? 2. This may be found in the attack of a common enemy. When the invader is on our coast, Tories and Radicals fight side by side, moved by a common

instinct of patriotism. When the truth of Christianity is assailed by infidelity and her life by worldliness and vice, should we not all rally round the standard of our one Captain for a united crusade against the power of our common enemy the devil? 3. This may be found in a good cause of universally recognised merit. Fidelity to truth, love to mankind, devotion to Christ should unite all Christians.—A.

EXPOSITION.

Ver. 18.—**The house of God.** In this rendering the A. V. follows the Vulgate, which has *in domum Dei, hoc est, in Silo*. But the Septuagint has Βαθλ, and all the ancient authorities, as well as modern commentators, generally agree in rendering it *Bethel*. The reason, which seems a conclusive one, for so doing is that the Hebrew בית אל invariably means *Bethel*, and that *the house of God* is always expressed in Hebrew by הַבַּיִת הָאֱלֹהִים (*beth-ha-elohim*). The conclusion is that at this time the ark of God, with the tabernacle, was at Bethel, which was only seven or eight miles from Shiloh. Bethel would be eight or ten miles from Gibeah, i. e. about half way between Shiloh and Gibeah. **Asked counsel.** The same phrase as ch. i. 1, where it is rendered simply *asked* (see note to ch. i. 1, and vers. 23, 47). In following this precedent the Israelites put the men of Gibeah on the footing of the Canaanite inhabitants of the land. With reference to ver. 9, it is worth considering whether this is not the fulfilment of the purpose there expressed by the Israelites, to go up against Gibeah *by lot*; either by understanding that the answer asked was given by a Divinely-directed *lot*, according to which Judah's turn came first (see Josh. vii. 14—18; 1 Sam. xiv. 41; Acts i. 24—26; &c.), or by taking the expression *by lot* in a wider sense, as meaning generally Divine direction.

Ver. 20.—**The men of Israel**—meaning here of course *the men of Judah*.

Ver. 21.—**Came forth out of Gibeah, &c.** Gibeah (sometimes called *Geba*, literally, *the hill*) was doubtless very difficult to assault, and the steep approach greatly favoured the defenders. The men of Judah probably came up carelessly, and with an overweening confidence, and so met with a terrible disaster. The word *destroyed* here used is the same as is applied to the destroying angel (Exod. xii. 23; 2 Sam. xxiv. 16; see also 2 Chron. xxiv. 23).

Ver. 23.—**And the children of Israel went up and wept, &c.** This verse must precede chronologically ver. 22, and explains the circumstances under which the battle referred to in ver. 22 took place. The unexpected repulse they had met with had begun to produce its intended effect. There was a humbling of themselves before God, a broken-

ness of spirit, a deepened sense of dependence upon God, and a softening of their feelings towards their brother Benjamin. All this was shown as they again went to the tabernacle at Bethel to ask the Lord (ver. 18).

Ver. 24.—**And, or so, repeating what had been said in ver. 22, but giving it this time as the result of God's answer recorded in ver. 23. The second day.** Not necessarily, or probably, the next day, but the day of the second battle.

Ver. 25.—**Of the children of Israel.** We are not told upon which tribe the lot fell, or the answer was given, that they should go up the second day.

Ver. 26.—**Then all the children of Israel, and all the people, &c.** Observe the word *all*, twice repeated, as showing how the whole congregation was roused and stirred to a man by this second reverse. *The people*, as distinguished from *the men of Israel*, the army, probably means the non-fighting people, the aged, the infirm, women, &c. **The house of God.** Render, as in ver. 18 (see note), *Bethel*. **Sat there.** Sitting with the Jews, especially on the ground, was the attitude of grief and mourning (Job ii. 13; Isa. xlvii. 1, 5; Lam. ii. 10, &c.). The Jews at the present day often sit on the ground at the place of wailing in Jerusalem. **Before the Lord, i. e. before the tabernacle** (see ch. xi. 11, note). **Fasted until evening.** The usual time for terminating a fast among the Jews, as at the present day among Mahomedans. For similar fasts on solemn occasions of national guilt or grief, see 1 Sam. vii. 6; 2 Sam. i. 12; Jer. xxxvi. 9; Neh. ix. 1; Joel i. 14, &c. **Peace offerings.** Usually thank offerings (Levit. iii.; vii. 11, 12), but applicable to any voluntary sacrifice of which the flesh might be eaten the same day, or the day following, by the offerer (Levit. vii. 15, 16). Doubtless the people at the close of their fast ate the flesh of these peace offerings.

Ver. 27.—**Enquired of the Lord.** In the Hebrew, *Asked the Lord*, as in vers. 18, 23. **For the ark of the covenant, &c.** A most important statement, defining the time of these occurrences, within the lifetime of Phinehas, and also giving a strong intimation that the writer of these words lived after the tabernacle had been removed from Shiloh and its neighbourhood to Jerusalem. **Was there.**

Where? The natural answer to be given is, At Bethel; for Bethel is the only place that has been named. But it is not in accordance with the other intimations given us concerning the tabernacle, that Bethel should be its resting-place under the high priesthood of Phinehas. In Josh. xviii. 1 we have the formal pitching of the tabernacle of the congregation at Shiloh; in Josh. xxii. 12 we find it there, and Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest before it; in 1 Sam. i. 3; ii. 14; iii. 21; iv. 3, we find it settled there till taken by the Philistines; and in Ps. lxxviii. 60 we find Shiloh described as the abode of the tabernacle till its capture by the Philistines, and there is no hint anywhere of Bethel or any other place having been the resting-place of the ark before it fell into the hands of the Philistines. Neither, again, is the explanation of some commentators, that the words *the ark . . . was there in those days* implies "that the ark of the covenant was only temporarily at Bethel," at all satisfactory. *In those days* has naturally a much wider and broader application, like the expression (ch. xvii. 6; xviii. 1), *In those days there was no king in Israel*, and contrasts the time of Phinehas and the judges with the times of the monarchy, when the ark and the high priest were at Jerusalem. Unless, therefore, we understand Bethel in vers. 18, 26, 31 to mean the house of God, which seems quite impossible, we must interpret the word *there* to mean Shiloh, and suppose that the writer took no count of the temporary removal to Bethel for the convenience of consultation, but considered that it was at Shiloh in one sense, though momentarily it was a few miles off. Possibly too in the fuller narrative, of which we have here the abridgment, the name of Shiloh was mentioned as that to which *there* referred.

Ver. 29.—**Set liers in wait.** Made wiser by misfortune, they now act cautiously.

Ver. 30.—**As at other times, or, this time as the other times** (see the same phrase, ver. 31, ch. xvi. 20; Numb. xxiv. 20).

Ver. 31.—**The house of God.** Here manifestly *Bethel*, as in the margin. *Gibeah in the field.* The A. V. is the natural rendering of the Hebrew words, which imply a *Gibeah in the field* different from *Gibeah*, as the Septuagint seems to have understood them (*Γαβὰδ ἐν ἀγρῷ*). It is a happy conjecture, borne out by the existing roads, that this *Gibeah-in-the-field* is the same as *Geba*, now *Jeba*. Indeed it is almost impossible to conceive how the pursuers, coming out of *Gibeah*, could be described as coming to two highways, of which one led to Bethel and the other to the very place they had come from. The latest explorers of the dis-

trict fully concur in this identification of *Gibeah-in-the-field* with *Jeba*.

Ver. 32.—**And the children of Benjamin, &c.** This verse is parenthetical, being explanatory of the conduct of both parties. The Benjamites pursued recklessly, because they thought the fight was going as on the two previous days; the Israelites fled in order to draw them to the highways, and so to enable the ambushment to get between the Benjamite army and the city.

Ver. 33.—**Rose up out of their place.** The narrative is singularly obscure and broken, and difficult to follow. But the meaning seems to be, that when the Israelite army had reached *Baal-tamar* in their flight, they suddenly stopped and formed to give battle to the pursuing Benjamites. And at the same time the liers in wait came out from their ambushment and placed themselves in the rear of the Benjamites on the direct road to *Gibeah*. *Baal-tamar*, a place of palm trees. The site has not been identified, but may possibly, or probably, be the same as the palm tree of Deborah, between Ramah and Bethel (ch. iv. 5). **The meadows of Gibeah**, Hebrew, *Maareh-Geba*, may very likely have been, as the Septuagint takes it, a proper name, denoting some locality outside *Gibeah* (here called *Geba*) where the ambush was concealed. The meaning of the word *maareh* is thought to be a bare tract of ground without trees—something like a heath or common. It may have had pits, or deep depressions, where the ambush would be hid both from the city itself and from the high road, or other facilities for concealment.

Ver. 34.—**Against Gibeah, i. e. against the army of Gibeah.** The sense seems to be that the 10,000 Israelites who had been fleeing before Benjamin, and drawing them away from the city, now faced them, and commenced a resolute attack upon them, which at first the Benjamites, not knowing of the ambushment in their rear met with equal resolution, so that "the battle was sore." But the result, the details of which are given at length in vers. 36—46, was that 25,100 Benjamites fell that day (see ver. 46).

Vers. 36—41.—**The children of Benjamin saw that they were smitten.** Not of course after 25,000 of them had been smitten, but at that period of the battle more fully described in vers. 40, 41, when the Benjamites, looking behind them, saw *Gibeah* in flames, and immediately broke and fled towards the wilderness. In the latter half of this verse and in the following verses to ver. 41 the writer recapitulates all the preceding circumstances, some of which have been already mentioned, which led to the particular incident mentioned in the beginning of the verse, that "Benjamin saw that they were smitten;" viz., the feigned flight of the Israelites, the seizing

and burning of Gibeah by the liars in wait, the signal of a great smoke, and the turning again of the flying Israelites. It was then that "the men of Benjamin saw that evil was come upon them," and turned their backs and fled. Thus vers. 36 (latter half)—41 bring us back through the details to the identical point already reached at the beginning of ver. 36. In vers. 39, 40 there is another retrograde movement in the narrative, in which the statement of vers. 31, 32 is repeated in order to bring into close juxtaposition Benjamin's keen pursuit of the enemy with his terror when he saw the smoke rising in his rear. **Hasted** (ver. 37). This is an amplification with further particulars of ver. 33. The liars in wait not only came forth out of their place, but they made a dash to get into Gibeah before the men of Gibeah, who were pursuing the flying Israelites, could be aware of their intention. **Rushed upon**. Perhaps better rendered *fell upon*. It is exactly the same phrase as 2 Sam. xxvii. 8, there rather tamely rendered *invaded* and in ver. 10 *made a road*. **Drew themselves along**. Some take the word in the common sense of *blowing the trumpet*, but it rather means *spread themselves out* (לִשְׁכַּח, LXX.) through the defenceless city, so as to slay and burn in all parts simultaneously. **That they should make a great flame with smoke, &c.** (ver. 38). The Hebrew of this verse is difficult to construe, but the A. V. gives substantially the right sense. They seem to be the very orders given to the leader of the ambush. "Make them (the ambush) multiply to send up (*i. e.* send up in great quantities) the column of smoke from the city." It seems that the appearance of the smoke was the signal for the Israelites to turn (ver. 41). **The flame, &c.** (ver. 40). Rather, *the column began to go up in (or as) a pillar of smoke*. **The flame of the city**. Literally, *the whole of the city*, meaning of course the whole city in flames.

Ver. 42.—**Therefore they turned their backs, &c.** The narrative now at length advances one step. The result of the Benjamites finding themselves between the ambushment and the army of Israel was that they took to flight in an easterly direction (ver. 43) toward the wilderness, *i. e.* the wilderness described in Josh. xvi. 1 as "the wilderness that goeth up from Jericho throughout Mount Bethel," where the direction of the wilderness relative to Ephraim is also described as being "on the east." In like manner Zedekiah fled towards the *plain* (*arabah*) or plains of Jericho—a term nearly synonymous with *wilderness* (2 Kings xxv. 4, 5). **Them which came out of the cities, &c.** This is a very obscure passage, and is very variously explained. *Those which came out of the cities* must be the same as are so de-

scribed in ver. 15, and designates the Benjamites who were not inhabitants of Gibeah. The simplest way, therefore, to understand the passage is to render it without reference to the accents: "And the battle overtook him and those that were from the cities (*i. e.* the men of Gibeah and the rest of the Benjamites), destroying him (the whole Benjamite army) in the midst of him," *i. e.* going right into the midst of them, and destroying right and left. Some, however, render it *in the midst of it*, *i. e.* of the wilderness. The plural participle *destroying* agrees with the singular noun of multitude, *the battle or war*, meaning *all the men of war*.

Ver. 43.—**Thus they inclosed, &c.** Another difficult passage, having all the appearance of being a quotation from some poetical description of the battle. The tenses of the verbs and the absence of any conjunctions in the Hebrew makes the diction like that of ch. v. 19. The italic words *thus* and the two *ands* ought to be omitted, to give the stately march of the original. "They inclosed, &c.; they chased them; they trod them down," &c. *They inclosed* seems to refer to the stratagem by which the Benjamites were surrounded by the ambush in their rear and the Israelites in front. Then came the pursuit—"they chased them;" then the massacre—"they trod them down." The three verbs describe the three stages of the battle. **With ease**. It does not seem possible that the Hebrew word *menuchah* can have this meaning. It means sometimes a *place of rest*, and sometimes a *state of rest*. Taking the latter meaning, the words *they trod them into rest* may mean *they quieted them by crushing them to death under their feet*, or *in rest* may mean *unresisting*. Some render it *unto Menuchah*, as if *Menuchah* was the name of a place, or from *Nochah*, as the Septuagint does. Others, *at the place of rest, i. e.* at every place where they halted to rest the enemy was upon them.

Vers. 44—46.—**And there fell, &c.** The account in ver. 35, anticipating the details of the battle, had already given the gross number of casualties in the Benjamite army on this disastrous day as 25,100. We now have the items of the account, *viz.* 18,000 in the pursuit, in the open plain; 5000 in the highways, *i. e.* either the highways mentioned in ver. 31, or, as the expression *gleaning* rather intimates, the highways by which straggling bodies tried to reach any neighbouring cities after the great slaughter had taken place; and 2000 more who were making for Gidom; in all 25,000, which is only 100 men short of the reckoning in ver. 35. **The rock of Rimmon**. See ver. 47, note. **Gidom**. Not elsewhere mentioned, nor identified with any modern name.

Ver. 47.—**But six hundred men turned.**

If these 600 survivors are added to the 25,000, or 25,100, enumerated as slain (vers. 35, 44), it gives a total of 25,700. But the total number of Benjamites, as given in ver. 15, was 26,700. There remain, therefore, 1000 men unaccounted for. These may have been killed partly in the two first days' successful battles (vers. 21, 25), and partly in the different cities into which they had escaped, when the general massacre recorded in ver. 48 took place. **The rock Rimmon.** There are two proposed identifications of this place. One makes it the same as *Rummon*, "a village perched on the summit of a conical chalky hill," "rising on the south side to a height of several hundred feet from the Wady Mutiyâh," and defended on the west side "by a cross valley of great depth," which lies three miles east of Bethel, and seven miles north-east of Gibeah (Tuleil el-Ful), and is situated in the wilderness between the highlands of Benjamin and the Jordan. This is advocated by Robinson ('Biblical Researches,' i. 440), by Mr. Grove in the 'Dictionary of the Bible,' and by Lt. Conder ('Quart. State. for

July 1880,' P. 173). The other is advocated by Mr. W. F. Birch ('Pal. Expl., Quart. State. for April 1880'). This identifies it with the *Wady er-Rummon*, discovered by Mr. Rawnsley, where there is a vast cave, *Mugharet el Jai*, about a mile and a half from Geba, capable, according to the local tradition, of holding 600 men, and used to the present day by the villagers as a place of refuge from the government persecutions. According to this view, the statement that they abode in the rock Rimmon is strictly correct.

Ver. 48.—**Turned again**, not the same word as the *turned* of vers. 45, 47, but *turned back*, came again by the way by which they had gone in pursuit of the Benjamites, and on their return towards Bethel (ch. xxi. 2) entered into all the Benjamite cities, which lay thick together east and north of Gibeah, and ruthlessly put all the remaining population to the sword; burning all the cities, and treating the whole tribe of Benjamin, with all that belonged to them, as a *herem*, a thing devoted to utter destruction, like Jericho.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 18—48.—*Pure and impure zeal.* That the indignation of Israel was justly excited by the wickedness of the men of Gibeah who can doubt? That they had a just cause of quarrel with the men of Benjamin for refusing to join them in the punishment of the offenders is no less certain. But that the merciless destruction of the whole tribe by fire and sword was a ferocious and cruel deed equally admits of no contradiction. A state of mind, therefore, was generated between the first rising of their wrath on account of the foul crime of their countrymen, and the final execution of the fierce vengeance, which calls for our notice and our reprobation. That state of mind was what the Greeks called ζῆλος, a burning, unreasoning passion or heat, which hurries men on to words or actions of which in their cooler moments they repent and are ashamed. Under the influence of such passion, whether it be anger, or jealousy, or envy, or any other intemperate emotion of the mind, men are no longer their own masters. As in the case of that state of feeling which we lately considered under the name of *temper* (Homiletics on ch. xx. 1—17), reason ceases to guide and control the actions, and the voice of conscience cannot make itself heard. The man is like a ship without a rudder, driven by the storm whither he would not. Now when we consider that under the influence of passion we are liable to say and do things that are wrong, and that are very contrary to our own real feelings and opinions, and, maybe, very hurtful to our neighbours, it is obvious how watchful every Christian man should be to keep such passion under strict control, and to set a watch upon the various movements of his heart. This is doubly necessary, because, as we have seen in the history before us, what in its beginning is right is apt in its course to become wrong. It is not merely a question of degree. But for the most part the *nature* of the passion changes in its onward flow. Thus, in the case of the Israelites, the first feeling of indignation at a great wrong, the shame at the pollution of the name of Israel, their common inheritance, and their grief at the dishonour done to the name of God, were righteous and commendable feelings. There was no need to water them down or to reason them away. It would have been base and wrong not to follow them out to their legitimate consequences in action. But in the course of doing so the pure stream became fouled by far baser passion. Anger at the contradiction and opposition offered to themselves, wounded pride at the success of their adversaries in the first days' battles, the fierce determination to quell and destroy their enemies, and the heat and blood-thirstiness which are the natural result of war

and strife, lashed them into madness. And so it is with ourselves. In war, in politics, in private quarrels, though we may begin by being in the right, yet the original cause is often lost sight of in the progress of the strife, and new jealousies, personal enmities, selfish resentments, and unwarrantable violence of feeling, which spring up, as it were, by the way, are allowed to get possession of us, and hurry us on to injustice and wrong. But especially does this painful narrative suggest a caution to those who take upon themselves to be the champions of right as against wrong to be very careful that no mere passions mix themselves up with their championship. We would say to every Christian brother, Be very zealous for right against wrong. Be very zealous for truth against falsehood. HAVE NO RESPECT OF PERSONS; and be as firm in rebuking wrong when it is found in those nearest and dearest to you as when it is found in strangers or enemies; and when it is found in the great and honourable, as when it is found in the meanest and lowest of mankind. But be very careful to keep your zeal pure. Let it be a simple zeal for God's honour and glory, and for his law and his truth. It will then never betray you into wrong speaking or wrong doing; and, moreover, it will effect its purpose among men. It will be a real witness for God, and it will make itself felt. While mere anger and passion are utterly feeble and worthless, and usually injure the cause they are meant to serve, the calm, steadfast opposition to wrong, by word or deed, will always have its weight. Such was the testimony of the words and life of the Lord Jesus upon earth. His zeal for his Father's honour was as a consuming fire; but it went hand in hand with an inexhaustible patience and gentleness towards men. We always feel in reading the Gospels that his severest rebukes sprang from his hatred for sin, and were combined with infinite love for the sinner. His whole life was a protest against wrong, but as gentle as it was firm, as winning as it was decided. Such should be the rebukes of his disciples—springing from principle, not from passion; severe, yet tender; unflinching, but never given without necessity; not unmixed with sympathy for the pain they cause, and anxiety to add the balm of love and forgiveness so soon as they have wrought repentance; never aggravated by personal feelings or heat of anger; never uttered in scorn, or with a sense of the rebuker's own superiority; but the outcome of an upright mind hating evil and zealous for God's honour, yet at the same time clothed with humility and tempered with heavenly charity.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 18.—Cf. on ch. i. ver. 1.—M.

Vers. 26—28.—*The difficulty of punishing evil-doers.* It is a desperate strife. The avengers are at first punished more than the guilty. Yet they continue steadfast, and humiliate themselves before God.

I. PRIVATE WRONGS ARE PUBLIC MISFORTUNES AND DANGERS. It was a peril to all peace-loving citizens that one of their number should suffer outrage. Yet also was it a further trouble and loss to punish such transgressors. How many will rather suffer wrong than take the trouble to bring it to justice! This is treason to the commonwealth.

II. HOW HARD IT IS TO ROOT OUT AN INDIVIDUAL OR NATIONAL SIN. How many are found to sympathise with or condone the deed, and to shield the transgressor! What ties connect the transgressor with ourselves!

III. THE SIN OF ONE IS OFTEN DUE TO THE GENERAL SPIRIT AND CONDITION OF THOSE AROUND HIM; THEY ALSO ARE GUILTY WITH HIM. Benjamin is but an exaggeration of the prevalent tone and manners of the time. Many crimes and sins of individuals may be traced up to wider influences. The sin or the righteousness of our brother is, in a measure, our own. Vicarious suffering and atonement.

IV. THE DUTY OF RIGHTING WRONG MUST BE CARRIED OUT AT WHATEVER EXPENSE OF TROUBLE AND LOSS. The humiliation of Israel. Defeat only nerves them to a higher and more heroic struggle. Religious principle and feeling are more influentially present. The absolute claim of God's righteousness. Like Israel the Church has to right a great wrong; but in a different way. Frequent discomfiture. The

difficulty of evangelising one's own neighbourhood; far less the world! Yet it *has to be done*, and it can be done; but not in our own strength. Only as we submit ourselves wholly to God and his Son can we fulfil the mighty task. Let us too wait upon God, and pluck wisdom and heroism from defeat. The Spirit of God is with us, and the promise of Christ is ours.—M.

Ver. 34.—“*They knew not that evil was near them.*” How descriptive this of all men! Our misfortunes often overtake us unawares. There is no earthly security. The sinner especially should not encourage himself in fancied immunity. The Son of man cometh as a thief in the night, for judgment and for reward.

I. THE UNCERTAIN NATURE OF THE FUTURE.

II. THE IGNORANCE AND HERDLESSNESS OF SINNERS RESPECTING GOD'S JUDGMENTS.

III. HOW TO BE DELIVERED FROM FEAR AND THE REAL EVILS OF THIS IGNORANCE. A righteous life the great safeguard. But how attained? Christ's the only authoritative “Fear not.” External evils will through him minister to our eternal welfare and well-being. This trust in him should be implicit, and an active force in every life.—M.

Ver. 23.—*Lessons of defeat.* The Christian sometimes encounters defeat in the enterprises of spiritual warfare—in the battle of the inner life, in efforts to destroy the wickedness and misery of the world, in missionary campaigns.

I. DEFEAT SHOULD AROUSE REFLECTION. The Israelites had acted hastily under the impulse of sudden indignation. In defeat they were thrown back to think of the object and methods of their war. This war against a brother tribe was a terrible undertaking. Was it necessary? No war should be undertaken till it is absolutely necessary. It may be our duty to oppose our own brethren; but this should be done only after serious reflection. We are sometimes allowed to fail that we may consider more deeply all that is involved in actions attended with serious consequences.

II. DEFEAT SHOULD INDUCE HUMILITY AND REPENTANCE. The Israelites had been too self-confident. Enraged at the wickedness of one town, they had not realised their own sin, nor how this wickedness was but one act of national depravity. They were now the champions of justice. The position thus assumed by them would blind them to their own failings and stimulate pride. When Christian men do battle against some monstrous evil, they too are in danger of falling into similar failings of pride and self-righteousness. Defeat is then a wholesome humiliation leading to repentance. If we are to testify against the sin of others, we too must not forget that we also are sinners.

III. DEFEAT SHOULD LEAD US TO SEEK COUNSEL OF GOD. 1. The Israelites had consulted some oracle, some “gods,” before going to war. After defeat they turned to the true God, the Eternal. We often need to fail before we will learn to pray. Then we see that our wisdom is to follow God's will. 2. The Israelites did not simply ask for success. They asked whether or no they should go up to war. We should not pray for God's blessing on the enterprise which we are obstinately pursuing irrespective of his will, but should first ask for light to teach us whether we should pursue it. 3. The Israelites did not ask for God's strength, but only for his guidance. Perhaps if they had invoked his aid they would not have failed a second time. We need trust in God and reliance on his help for perfect success.

IV. DEFEAT SHOULD LEAD TO RENEWED AND IMPROVED EFFORT. Through repeated defeats Israel persevered on to victory. So it is with the Christian. “Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down” (Ps. xxxvii. 24).—A.

Ver. 47.—“*An escaped remnant.*” I. THERE IS USUALLY AN ESCAPED REMNANT FROM THE MOST SEVERE PROVIDENTIAL ACT OF JUDGMENT. So it was in the flood, in the destruction of the cities of the plain, in the captivity, in the conquest of Jerusalem by the Romans. God does not totally destroy. Mercy is mingled with judgment. Though this is some mitigation of the calamity, it is no reason for rash indifference to danger, because (1) the remnant may be but a small minority, (2) none can tell whether they will be included in it, and (3) the remnant, though escaping the worst fate, suffers great hardships.

II. THE REMNANT DOES NOT NECESSARILY CONSIST OF BETTER MEN THAN THOSE WHO ARE DESTROYED. If one is taken and another left, this diversity of treatment is no proof of difference of character. As they who are subject to signal calamities are not to be regarded as especially wicked (*e. g.* Job, the men on whom the tower of Siloam fell, &c.), so those who are favoured by remarkable deliverances have no right to be considered especially virtuous. Their position is one to excite special gratitude, but not to encourage pride. Sometimes, indeed, it is dishonourable to them. It may be a result of cowardice, indolence, or falsehood. The traitor may escape while the true man falls. Barabbas escaped while Christ was crucified. In times of persecution the unfaithful are saved and the faithful suffer martyrdom.

III. THERE IS A PROVIDENTIAL END TO BE SECURED BY THE PRESERVATION OF A REMNANT. The idea of "the remnant" is familiar to the reader of Scripture (*e. g.* Isa. i. 9). There must be some Divine purpose in it. Can we discover that purpose? Possibly it is this—every nation, every tribe, every community of men which has special characteristics of its own has also a special mission to the world dependent on those characteristics. If, therefore, it is entirely blotted out of existence, the fruits of that mission will be lost to the world. A remnant is spared that the special gifts may be transmitted through a small hereditary line, and thus be preserved and turned to the continued service of the world. Israel had a mission to the world dependent on her peculiar endowments. If the remnant of Israel had not been delivered from Babylon, this mission would have been destroyed, and the human side of the origin of Christianity, such as we now see it, made impossible. Benjamin had a mission. From this tribe sprang the first king of Israel and the chief of Christ's apostles. If the 600 Benjamites had not been spared St. Paul would never have appeared.—A.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XXI.

Ver. 1.—*Now the men of Israel, &c.* A circumstance not mentioned before is now brought forward, as is another in ver. 5, on which the events about to be narrated in this chapter depend, viz., that the men of Israel had taken two solemn oaths at Mizpeh (ch. xx. 1)—the one that no Israelite would give his daughter in marriage to a Benjamite; the other that whosoever did not come up to the national assembly there should be put to death.

Ver. 2.—*And the people, &c.* The narrative now proceeds. After *the people*, i. e. the Israelite army, so described ch. xx. 3, 8, 22, &c., had finished the work of destruction in the cities of Benjamin, they returned to Bethel (the house of God, A. V., here and in ch. xx. 18, 26, 31, where see notes), and, their rage having now subsided, gave way to violent grief on account of the destruction of Benjamin their brother. With passionate Oriental feelings they passed the whole day weeping, and probably fasting (see ch. xx. 26), before the tabernacle. *Wept sore.* Hebrew, *wept a great weeping.* The expression *lifted up their voices* shows that it was a loud wailing and lamentation.

Ver. 3.—*And said. Better, And they said. One tribe lacking.* The existence of the twelve tribes was an essential part of their covenant existence as the people of God

(Gen. xxxv. 22; xlix. 28; Exod. xxiv. 4; Numb. i. 5—15; Josh. iv. 3, 4, &c.; Matt. xix. 28; James i. 1; Rev. vii. 4, &c.). With one tribe missing Israel would be no longer Israel.

Ver. 4.—*Offered burnt offerings and peace offerings.* See ch. xx. 26, note.

Ver. 5.—*And the children of Israel said.* The idea evidently occurred to them that they might supply wives to the 600 Benjamites in the way that actually came to pass, and they asked the question, *Who is there among all the tribes, &c., with this view.*

Vers. 6—9.—*And the children of Israel, &c.* This verse goes back a little to explain why the children of Israel asked the question, viz., because they repented them for Benjamin, and wished to repair the mischief resulting from their rash oath not to give their daughters to a Benjamite; therefore they said (repeating ver. 5), What one is there that came not up to Mizpeh? (ver. 8) and on numbering the people it was found that no one had come up from Jabesh-gilead. This is the first time that Jabesh-gilead is mentioned in Scripture. It comes up twice afterwards. First in 1 Sam. xi., on occasion of its being besieged by the Ammonites and rescued by Saul; and secondly in 1 Sam. xxxi. 11—13, when the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead took down the bodies of Saul and his sons from the wall of Beth-shan, and buried them at Jabesh, for which brave and pious

act David thanked them (2 Sam. ii. 5). The name of *Jabesh* is only preserved in the *Wady Yabis*, which debouches on the eastern bank of the Jordan about lat. 32°24'. Robinson thinks the ruins called *ed Deir* in this valley are the remains of *Jabesh*, which agrees exactly with the situation assigned to it by Eusebius in the 'Onomasticon.'

Vers. 10, 11.—**Ye shall utterly destroy**, &c. Devote to destruction, as a *'herem*, an accursed thing. They followed in the severity of the punishment the precedent of the destruction of the Midianites (see Numb. xxxi. 17), and even in the numbers sent to destroy them—a thousand from every tribe (Numb. xxxi. 5). Revolting to our feelings as such wholesale massacres are, including women and children, it must be remembered in mitigation that the *'herem* was the solemn devotion of a thing or person to destruction under the sanction of an oath. **Of the valiantest**. *The sons of valour* simply means *valiant men* (2 Sam. xiii. 28; xvii. 10).

Ver. 12.—**To Shiloh**, whither it should seem they had now taken the tabernacle back, the war with Benjamin no longer requiring its presence at Bethel. **Them**. It is masculine in the Hebrew, though it refers to the women. So again in ver. 22, *their fathers and their brothers* in the masculine (see above, ch. xix. 23, and vers. 21, 22). It is perhaps an archaism. **In the land of Canaan**. This is inserted to contrast it with *Jabesh* in Gilead (Gen. xxxiii. 17, 18, and ch. viii. 5, note).

Ver. 13.—Translate the whole verse thus: *And the whole congregation sent and spake to the children of Benjamin, &c., and proclaimed peace to them* (see Deut. xx. 10). They sent ambassadors or heralds to them as it were with a flag of truce.

Ver. 14.—**Benjamin came again**, i. e. returned to their own homes in the tribe of Benjamin, as in ver. 23. **Yet so they sufficed them not**—or, *Yet so they* (the Israelites) *did not provide enough for them* (the Benjamites); or, *Yet so they* (the Benjamites) *had not enough for themselves*.

Ver. 16.—**Seeing the women**. It is rather more in accordance with the Hebrew style to take the words as the narrator's explanation of the question, *What shall we do?* They said this because all the women of Benjamin had been destroyed.

Ver. 17.—**There must be an inheritance for them that be escaped of Benjamin**. The passage is difficult to construe and to explain. If the words *There must be* are properly supplied in the A. V., the sense will come out more clearly if we take the word *inheritance* to mean rather *succession*, which is the idea contained in the root. *There must be a succession for the escaped of Benjamin*, i. e. there

must be heirs to succeed, and therefore we must find wives for them. The word *peleytah* without the article can hardly mean *the remnant*, as has been proposed, but must be defined by being taken with *Benjamin*.

Ver. 18.—**We are not able**. Note again the evil of rash vows, and how often chicanery is necessary in order to evade their evil consequences.

Ver. 19.—**There is a feast of the Lord in Shiloh yearly**. Compare the exactly similar description, 1 Sam. i. 3, 7. There is a great difference of opinion among commentators as to what feast is here meant. Hengstenberg, Keil, Delitzsch, and others think it was the passover; Bishop Patrick and others think it was the feast of tabernacles, a more joyous feast; Rosenmüller and others think it was a festival peculiar to Shiloh, after the analogy of the yearly sacrifice of the family of Jesse at Bethlehem (1 Sam. xx. 29), and more or less in accordance with Deut. xii. 10—12. It is not easy to say which view is right, but the last seems not improbable. **In a place which is on the north side**, &c. The words *in a place* are not in the Hebrew, and do not seem to be implied by the context. But the description is that of the situation of Shiloh itself, which is very exact (see 'Palestine Exploration Fund, Map of West Palestine'). **Lebonah** survives in el-Lubbun, about two miles north-west of Seilân, and to the west of the road to Shechem or Nablûs. It seems strange that so particular a description of the situation of Shiloh should be given; but it may probably indicate that the writer lived after the tabernacle had been moved to Jerusalem, and Shiloh had relapsed into an obscure village (see ch. xx. 27, note). The situation of the descriptive words in the Hebrew, with the pronoun *which*, separated from *Shiloh* by the word *yearly*, indicates that they are an explanation added by the narrator.

Ver. 21.—**Come out**. The verb is in the masculine gender, though *the daughters of Shiloh* is the subject (see above, ver. 12, note). **To dance in dances**. Bishop Patrick says that the feast of tabernacles was the only feast at which Jewish maidens were permitted to dance. **Go to the land of Benjamin**. The close vicinity of the high road leading from Shechem to Bethel on the border of Benjamin would facilitate their flight.

Ver. 22.—**Be favourable unto them for our sakes**. Rather, *Grant us them as a favour*, the masculine *them* referring to *the daughters of Shiloh*, as in ver. 12, and the verb *grant a favour* being followed by a double accusative. **We reserved not to each man his wife**, &c. These words are somewhat difficult. If we may insert the word *to*, as the A. V. does, before *each man* (for it

is wanting in the Hebrew), the sense is good. The Israelites acknowledge their own fault in not reserving women enough to be wives to the Benjamites, and ask the fathers and brothers of the daughters of Shiloh to do them a favour by enabling them to repair their fault. But it is rather a strain upon the words. The omission of the *to* is not natural in such a phrase (Numb. xxvi. 54 is hardly to the point, nor is Gen. xli. 12, where the *to* had been expressed before the *us*), and *reserved* is a forced interpretation of the verb. If the words were spoken by the Benjamites, all would be plain and easy: "We received not each man his wife in the war." Hence some put the speech into the mouth of Benjamin, as though the Israelites meant, We will say in your names, in your persons, as your attorneys, so to speak, "Grant them to us," &c. But this is rather

forced. Others, therefore, follow the Peschito, and read, "*because THEY received not each man his wife,*" &c., which makes very good sense, but has not MS. authority. *Ye did not give*, &c., i. e. you need not fear the guilt of the broken oath, because you did not *give* your daughters, so as to violate the oath (ver. 7), but they were taken from you by force. The A. V. gives the probable meaning of the passage, though it is somewhat obscure.

Ver. 23.—*According to their number*, i. e. so as to provide the 200 with wives. *The cities*, as in ch. xx. 15, 42.

Ver. 24.—*Every man to his inheritance*. Compare the breaking up of the national assembly in the days of Joshua (Josh. xxiv. 28; Judges ii. 6).

Ver. 25.—*In those days*, &c. See ch. xvii. 6; xviii. 1, &c.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—25.—*War*. Who can think of the flourishing tribe of Benjamin reduced to a handful of 600 men, clinging for life to an inaccessible rock, but having to mourn the loss of wives and daughters, and sisters and children, all ruthlessly slaughtered with the edge of the sword, and not shudder at the horrors of war? It is a distressing picture to bring before the mind, but the picture must be looked at in its details if we would form a right judgment on the subject. Well, then, in war there is first the snapping asunder of the bonds of neighbourhood and friendship which once existed between the parties. There is the exchange of hatred, and ill-will, and the desire to injure and destroy, for amity and kindness and benevolence. The word "the enemy" takes the place of that of "friend," and the change of conduct corresponds to the change of name; for there soon follow the acts of destruction and vengeance. Precious life, that mysterious gift of God, is spilt like water on the ground. The bleeding wounds, the mangled limbs, the lifeless corpse, take the place of the buoyant spirits, the active frame, and the healthful vigour, of youth and manhood. The happy home where affection and social mirth and bright hopes and schemes made happiness and light, becomes the house of mourning where all hope is put out. The husband, the betrothed, the brother, the darling son, is laid low in dust and blood; and what is life any longer to the wife, to the expecting bride, to the sister, to the bereaved mother? And in such a war as this with Benjamin there are still more revolting images to be contemplated. The ground strewed with innocent babes and little children unconscious of wrong, and unsuspecting of harm. Merry youths and laughing maidens cut down in the spring-time of their life. Homesteads, orchards, gardens, whole streets, whole cities, reduced to heaps of rubbish and ashes. All the works of men's hands, the fruit of their labours, the product of their skill, the ornament, the comfort, the very shelter and food needful for human life, spoiled, wasted, and destroyed; human progress thrown back for a century, and seeds of hatred sown to bring forth a crop of bitterness in times to come. Thank God, war has been shorn in our days of its savage cruelty. Soldiers no longer slaughter women and children and defenceless men, nor destroy in the mere wantonness of power. Most true also is it that in war some of the noblest qualities of men are developed, and that kindness, mercy, and generosity, are the frequent companions of daring courage, resolute endurance, and inflexible will. The brave leader of men is deserving of all the gratitude and all the enthusiasm of his fellow-men; and as long as war is a necessity, he who conducts it to a successful end for his country's good will always merit his country's praise. But for all that, it must be acknowledged that war, even in its mitigated form, is a blight upon humanity, and that its continuance is a blot upon civilisation, and still more upon the national profession of

Christianity. He would indeed be a benefactor of the human race who could discover and establish the machinery by which national quarrels and disagreements could be settled by some other arbitrament than that of the sword. Viewed even in an economic point of view, how great would the gain be to nations if the half million or the million of men in the prime of life who are now supported in industrial idleness at the expense of their countrymen were, instead, contributing their own quota to the production and to the wealth of the country! And if the vast sums of money now spent on a single war were devoted to useful works and to great social improvements, how greatly would the world be benefited, instead of being, as now, impoverished and made desolate! How to get rid of war, and at the same time maintain the national dignity and not compromise the national safety, is indeed a problem difficult to solve. The existence of force may be necessary for the maintenance of right. But for all that, the discovery of the means by which bloody wars might be exchanged for some binding code of national law, to which the strongest as well as the weakest should be subject, would be a signal blessing to mankind. The subject is well worth the consideration of every Christian philanthropist. Surely, too, we are encouraged to hope for success by the glowing words of prophecy. A day will come, we know, when "nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Isa. ii. 4). The Psalmist saw a blessed vision of a time when there shall be "abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth" (Ps. lxxii. 7). The Holy Ghost speaks of a time when "they shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (Isa. xi. 9). And, even if in no other way we can hope to succeed, let us, at least, use our utmost endeavour to spread that knowledge of the Prince of peace at home and abroad which is the surest guarantee of peace. We know not when or how the kingdom of righteousness and peace shall be established. But we know that in proportion as the gospel of peace influences men's hearts, controls their passions, and incites them to brotherly love, the motives to war will be diminished, the motives to harmony and union will be strengthened. May the time come quickly when in the love of Christ, whether present in glory, or still dwelling in the heavens, the love of man to man shall so abound that in the family, in the nation, and in the world, there may be only PEACE!

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 1.—"*There shall not any of us give his daughter unto Benjamin to wife.*" A rule of justice, morality, and prudence. Benjamin represents the libertine, a character too common in our own day. Here is a method of dealing with such men that ought to commend itself to every parent.

I. PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY IN SANCTIONING MARRIAGE.

II. THE CONSIDERATIONS THAT OUGHT TO GOVERN IT. The welfare of the child; the possibility of greater happiness and usefulness; and provision for the future. Moral soundness ought therefore to be a *sine qua non* in all aspirants to the hand of a Christian man's daughter. What security can there be for the wife of a licentious man, even if he be as wealthy as Croesus? Righteousness of life and a Christian character should be the first and indispensable qualifications of a son-in-law.

III. ADVANTAGES OF SUCH A COURSE AS THIS. If parents would exclude from their homes, their drawing-rooms, and the society of their children persons known to be licentious, it would exert great influence—1. *In checking such conduct.* 2. *In preventing society from thinking lightly of it.*—M.

Ver. 25.—"*In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes.*" This is the key-note, as it is the refrain, of the whole book. The point raised is one of great significance in dealing with the foundations of Society and the State.

I. THE EVILS ARISING FROM AN EXCESS OF INDIVIDUALISM AMONGST MEN.

II. THE NECESSITY FOR SOME COMMON EXTERNAL BOND AND SANCTION FOR CONDUCT AND LIFE.—M.

Vers. 2—4.—*Sorrow for others.* I. IT IS NATURAL TO BE DISTRESSED AT THE TROUBLES OF OTHERS. 1. It is natural on *personal* grounds. We are members one of another, so that if one member suffer, all suffer. The Israelites felt that it would be a common calamity to the whole nation for one tribe to be blotted out. It would not only be a judgment on that tribe, it would be "a breach in the tribes of Israel." England suffers through the wars and famines and storms which devastate even remote countries. If adversity falls upon one great town, one trade, one class, the whole community feels the effect of it. It is foolish, on selfish considerations alone, for the rich and happy to ignore the distresses of the poor and wretched. 2. But it is natural to be distressed at the troubles of others on *unselfish* grounds. When we are not hardened by sin we must naturally feel sympathy. The law of Christ requires us to bear one another's burdens (Gal. vi. 2). If Jews of old felt for their brethren in their trouble, how can Christians, who owe all their best blessings to the compassion and suffering of Christ for them, harden their hearts against the cries of the world's misery, when they in turn are expected to show the spirit of Christ in sympathy and vicarious sacrifice?

II. IF WE ARE CALLED TO PUNISH MEN FOR THEIR SIN, WE SHOULD ALSO PITY THEM FOR THEIR DISTRESS. Israel had punished the tribe of Benjamin, but the sight of the ruin thus wrought filled all the people with grief. It is right and necessary to be firm in repressing wickedness; yet this should not be done in hot hatred, in callous sternness, nor in complacent self-satisfaction, but with grief, mourning for the distress, and more for the sin occasioning it. So does God chastise, in grief, like a father loving his child, and therefore the more hating the iniquity which produces all the trouble.

III. DISTRESS FOR THE TROUBLES OF OTHERS SHOULD LEAD US TO GOD ON THEIR BEHALF. The people came to the house of God, and wept there before God. We should bring all our trouble before God, and, when we know not what to ask for, confide in him and relieve our souls by leaving the burden with him. If we are really and deeply grieved for others, we shall be constrained to do the same with the sorrow of sympathy. All Christians are called to be priests, intercessors for others. We should pray most earnestly for those who will not pray for themselves. We should humble ourselves for their sin, since the oneness of the human family brings shame upon all when any go astray. Such sorrow before God will incline us to fresh acts of self-sacrifice and dedication. As the Israelites offered burnt offerings, we shall consecrate ourselves to God, that we may be more capable of relieving those for whom we grieve.—A.

Ver. 5.—*The penalty of desertion.* It was quite in accordance with the rude and cruel age of the judges that a whole town should be visited with the death-penalty for deserting the tribes in the assembly of war. The punishment was not so unreasonable as it might appear at first sight, though there are circumstances in the whole transaction which reflect discredit on the Israelites.

I. DESERTION IS A GREAT CRIME. In war-time, even among civilised nations, desertion is punished with death. 1. Negative wickedness may be as bad as positive sin. If we know that an equally injurious result will follow inaction, this is equally guilty with an active offence. Thus the refusal of a ship's master to save a drowning man is morally equal to the guilt of murdering him. 2. We must not measure the value of our actions by their individual effects, but by the effects of the principles they express. One act of desertion may have no perceptible effect. But if one is justifiable, many are, and thus the principle of freedom to desert allows of total desertion resulting in total ruin. Desertion from the cause of Christ is a great sin. To refrain from obeying his call to action is as guilty as to actively disobey him. 3. The crime which is heinous when committed by one man is equally bad when committed by a whole community. We should not think of destroying a town for the crime for which we should execute an individual; but this is because of our horror of wholesale slaughter, &c., and not because evil desert is lessened when it is shared by a number.

II. CHARITY IS NO EXCUSE FOR THE NEGLECT OF DUTY. That was a terrible work to which the tribes were summoned—the slaughter of the Benjamites. Yet if they felt it to be a necessary act of justice sanctioned by God, as they evidently did feel it

to be, they had no right to shrink from it out of feelings of kindness. It is terrible to be called to such a duty; but it is brave and noble to accept the odium when the necessity is felt, and weak and selfish to avoid it. Charity is not honoured by the sacrifice of justice. It is more charitable to punish wickedness than to let it work its evil unchecked. Charity to the criminal often means cruelty to the victim. There is a danger lest we should become so mild that we should virtually punish the innocent in order to spare the guilty.

III. THE PURITY OF JUSTICE IS VIOLATED WHEN PUNISHMENT IS ADMINISTERED WITH INTERESTED MOTIVES. It appears that the great motive of the Israelites in executing the threat of their oath on the people of Jabesh-Gilead was not a regard for strict justice, but a desire to secure wives for the escaped Benjamites. This motive vitiated the character of their action. The difficulty of executing punitive justice lies in the danger of other motives than a simple regard for right entering into our conduct. We desecrate the temple of justice when we convert it into a house of merchandise.—A.

Ver. 24.—*The return of peaceful prosperity.* I. MEN FIND THEIR MOST HAPPY CONDITION IN THE PURSUIT OF PEACEFUL OCCUPATIONS AND THE ENJOYMENT OF HOME LIFE. It is pleasing to see this concourse of war break up, and the Israelites return home to their farms and their families. War is unnatural, and should be treated as a monstrous evil. The nation which regards military exploits as the chief occupation for its energies is forsaking solid happiness for empty glory. 1. *Politically* a nation is prosperous when industry flourishes, trade is unchecked, literature finds patrons, science and art are pursued, and general education, morality, and religion are sedulously promoted by the leading men of the age. 2. *Religiously* a people is prosperous when angry controversy gives place to the peaceful cultivation of holiness, and practical efforts to conquer the sin of the world and spread the blessings of Christianity. 3. *Personally* men are prosperous when they are at liberty to work in peace and enjoy the fruits of their labours without molestation. In proportion as war, controversy, jealousy, and competition give place to quiet home life and simple endeavours to do our daily duties will happiness be enjoyed as a solid, lasting human treasure.

II. IT IS SOMETIMES NOT POSSIBLE TO ENJOY SOLID PEACE TILL AFTER THE FAITHFUL PERFORMANCE OF THE DUTIES OF WARFARE. The peace which the Israelites now enjoyed was the reward which followed the faithful performance of painful acts of justice. The cry of "peace at any price" may be the ignominious utterance of blindness, indolence, cowardice, or selfishness. We can have no worthy peace while the wrongs of any who have claims upon us call for our active interference. 1. *National peace* must follow the establishment of order and justice. Better all the horrors of civil war than unchecked tyranny, unpunished violence, or outraged innocence. 2. *Religious peace* must follow the righteous maintenance of truth and right. We must not let false religions go unchallenged, or unholy conduct unrebuked, for the sake of preserving peace. Christ came to send a sword (Matt. x. 34), and his peace comes after the valiant overthrow of the lies and sins which oppose his rule. 3. *Personal peace* must follow the battle of the soul with its sins and doubts. That is a hollow peace which comes from stifling doubt. We must fight it down. No true peace is possible while sinful habits are unopposed; these must be "resisted unto blood." True peace follows victory over evil.

III. A PEACEFUL LIFE IS SECURED AND MAINTAINED THROUGH THE EFFORT OF EACH MAN TO TAKE HIS OWN PLACE AND DO HIS OWN WORK. Trouble too often arises from our forsaking our post and interfering with other people. 1. *Industry* is favourable to peaceful prosperity. The children of Israel went home immediately after settling affairs in the disturbed district. They went straight from war to work, and wasted no time in idle self-indulgence as a reward for victory. 2. *Orderly* arrangements promote peace. Every man went to his tribe. Let each of us find his own place in the world, and seek quietly to occupy that, and nothing else. 3. *Domestic* life inclines to peace. Every man went to his family. The home is the foundation of the most solid blessings of the State. If we desire happiness and peaceful prosperity, let us cherish the sanctities of the hearth. 4. *Property* favours peace. The men went to

their several inheritances. When a man has possessions he is reluctant to create a social disturbance. Therefore lovers of peace should promote thrift and efforts to facilitate the acquisition of property by the people generally—of course as the fruits of honest industry. 5. *Religious convictions* form the most solid foundations for peaceful prosperity. The Israelites accepted their inheritances quietly in obedience to a Divine distribution. We shall enjoy a peaceful life best if we believe that God chooses our inheritance, and accept our lot in contentment and trustfulness from him, endeavouring to use it as his stewards, and hoping for the perfect inheritance of the everlasting home which he will give to his faithful people.—A.

HOMILETICAL INDEX

TO

THE BOOK OF JUDGES.

CHAPTER I.				CHAPTER III.			
THEME		PAGE		THEME		PAGE	
Inquiry of God	1			Ungodly Marriages	28		
Transfer of Authority	3			The Proving of Israel	29		
Spiritual Initiatives	5			The Forbidden Covenant	29		
Alliances in the Holy War	5			God's Scourge	31		
Correspondence of Crime and Requital	6			Idolatry and its Nemesis	32		
The Death of the Great	7			True Deliverance must ever come from			
Mutual Help	8			God	32		
Retribution	8			Natural Advantages and Endowments			
Faith	10			Perfect and Crowned by Consecra-			
The Public Spirit of Caleb	12			tion	33		
Compensations	12			The Secret of Individual and National			
Divine Help <i>versus</i> Material Obstacles	13			Greatness	33		
A Title to be made Good	13			"And the land had rest"—the True			
The Presence of God in the Battle of				Peace	33		
Life	14			Great Men	33		
Weak Faith producing Weak Action ...	15			Miscellaneous Thoughts	35		
An Unwilling Helper of the Cause of				Continued and Repeated Offence en-			
God	16			tails more Signal Punishment	37		
Human Wisdom <i>versus</i> Divine	16			Ehud	37		
The Failure of Duty of One an Occasion				Shamgar	37		
of Inconvenience to Another	17			A Man Left-handed	38		
CHAPTER II.				CHAPTER IV.			
The Expostulation	18			The Variety of God's Instruments.			
Bochim	19			The Weakness of God's Instru-			
The Preaching of Repentance	20			ments	40		
Influence	21			Temporary Influences and a Perma-			
The Force of Personal Testimony and				nent Tendency	41		
Influence	23			The Battle of the Brook Kishon, or			
Israel's Apostasy	23			Material Force <i>versus</i> Spiritual	42		
The Goodness and Severity of God ...	24			Deborah and Barak	43		
Mercy in the midst of Judgment	26			Patriotic Treachery	44		
Tested by Temptation	26						

CHAPTER V.		THEME	PAGE
Self-Sacrifice and its Inspirer	48
National Ruin and the True Deliverer	49
The Peril of National Irreligion	49
Testimony and Thanksgiving the Duty of the Redeemed	50
National Defence a Common Responsibility	50
The Hopelessness of Opposition to God	51
The Curse of Meroz	51
The Conduct of Jael	51
The Sunlike Life	52
A Mother in Israel	52
Self-Dedication	53
Literary Occupations	54
Indolent Indecision	55
The Curse of Meroz	55
The Triumph of the Church	56
CHAPTER VI.			
The Fruit of Ingratitude	57
Israel's Extremity	58
Divine Mercy: its Adaptation and Sufficiency	58
Merciful Reproof	59
God Sought and Found in Times of Trouble	59
The Preparation	61
The Call of Gideon	62
The Paradox of the Divine Presence	63
The Assuring Thought of God's Servant	63
Asking for a Sign	64
The Sign—the Present turned into a Sacrifice	64
Jehovah Shalom, or Spiritual Forebodings stilled	65
Diffidence	65
The Action commenced	67
The First Work	68
Who hath done this Thing?	69
Jerubbaal, or, Is an Idol Anything?	69
Gideon the Iconoclast	69
The Divine Side of Human History	71
The Crisis and the Confirmation	72
CHAPTER VII.			
The Sifting	74
Divinely-ordained Tests	75
"Mine own hand hath saved me"	76
Success not Dependent on Numbers	77
Faith	79
The Crowning Sign	81
Inspired Tactics	82
CHAPTER VIII.			
Following up Advantage	83
Gideon's Ruse	83
The Blindness of Self-Love	84
Dealing with Obstructives	84
"Faint, yet pursuing"	86, 87
The Complete Revenge	89
Prosperity	92
Noble Self-Abnegation	93
The Mistake of a Good Man	94
The After Life	94
The Consequence of the Imperfect Recognition of Jehovah	95
Gideon and the Theocracy	95
Forgetfulness and Ingratitude	96
CHAPTER IX.			
Self-Aggrandisement	98
Ambitious Usurpation	99
Unrighteous Claims of Kindred	99
Shortcomings of Unscrupulous Schemes	100
Abimelech	100
The Handwriting on the Wall	102
Jotham's Fable; or, Popular Election, its Dangers and Abuses	103
Strength in Weakness	104
Jotham's Parable	104
Be sure your sin will find you out	108
The Nemesis of Usurpation	109
A Worthy Servant of a Worthless Master	109
Without a Leader	110
Reputation	110
CHAPTER X.			
The Lull	111
The Calm after the Storm	112
Quiet Times	112
The Ethiopian's Unchanged Skin	114
Recurring Habits of Evil	116
Immediate and Effectual Retribution	116
God answering Hardened Transgressors	116
"Works meet for repentance"	116
Faith restoring Courage and Might	116
From God to Baal	117
The Test of Trouble	117
Repentance	118
CHAPTER XI.			
The Controversy	121
The Shaping Influences of Life	122

THEME	PAGE
Magnanimity of Patriotism ...	123
Recognition of God in Positions of Honour and Responsibility ...	124
The Model Diplomatist ...	124
The Friend in Need ...	124
Human Perverseness embittering the Sweet Cup ...	126
The Spirit of Sacred Warfare ...	127
Jephthah's Vow ...	128
The Spirit of the Lord ...	129
Jephthah's Vow ...	130

CHAPTER XII.

The Envy of the Small Great at the Great Deeds of the Small ...	131
Ingratitude the Frequent Reward of Benefactors ...	132
The Reproach of the Righteous ...	133
Shibboleth :—The Importance of Little Defects, Faults, &c. ...	133
Tests : their Good and Evil ...	134
"Vaulting Ambition," which "o'erleaps itself" ...	134
Jealousy ...	135
Shibboleth ...	136
The Calm after the Storm ...	137

CHAPTER XIII.

Married Life ...	140
A Natural Desire and its Gracious Fulfilment ...	141
The Difficulty of Salvation ...	142
God's Use of Unlikely Means for Gracious Ends ...	143
Divine Punishment and Preparation of Deliverance Simultaneous ...	143
Repetition of Divine Favours ...	143
Parental Anxiety and its Satisfying ...	144
The Wonderful Name ...	144
Reassurance of Divine Favour ...	145
Fulfilment of Promise ...	145
Samson the Nazarite ...	145
The Training of Children ...	146
The Mystery of a Name ...	147
The Fear of the Vision of God ...	148
The Young Samson ...	148

CHAPTER XIV.

The Link of the Chain ...	150
Human Desire overruled for Divine Ends ...	151
The Lion in the Way ...	152

THEME	PAGE
The Fearlessness and Modesty of the Spiritual Hero ...	152
The Mystery of Spiritual Might ...	152
Recalling Past Deliverances ...	152
Samson and the Lion ...	153
Another View of Married Life ...	155
Samson's Riddle ...	156
Unlawful Methods of interpreting Divine Mysteries ...	157
Ploughing with Another's Heifer ...	157
How Confidence in Wicked Men is Rewarded ...	157
Samson's Riddle ...	157

CHAPTER XV.

The Progress of the Feud ...	159
Atonements of the Unrighteous ...	160
God's Servant set Free by the Providences of Life ...	160
Foxes and Firebrands ...	160
Those who have Occasioned Evil punished for those who Caused it ...	161
Requiting Evil for Good, and Good for Evil ...	161
Ingenuity and Originality ...	161
Man without God, and Man with God ...	163
Imperfect Means made Effectual by Divine Inspiration ...	165
The Self-Refreshment of Divine Service ...	165
The Jawbone of an Ass ...	165
Distress after Triumph ...	166

CHAPTER XVI.

Presumption leading to a Fall ...	168
God redeeming the Error of His Servant ...	170
Samson's Betrayal and Fall ...	171
"And he wist not that the Lord (Jehovah) was departed from him" ...	172
Samson's Weakness ...	172
God's Departure from the Soul unrecognised ...	173
The Short-lived Triumph ...	175
A Hero's Exodus ...	176
Samson's Heroic Death ...	176

CHAPTER XVII.

The Superstitious Worship of the True God ...	179
The History of a Man-made Ministry : 1. Its Genesis ...	181
Avarice and Superstition ...	182

THEME	PAGE	THEME	PAGE
No King	183	The Duty of considering Painful Sub-	
Faith in the Priest	184	jects	197
CHAPTER XVIII.		CHAPTER XX.	
Society without a Head ceasing to be		Temper	200
Society	188	National Atonement	201
The History of a Man-made Ministry:		Union	201
2. Its Abuse	189	Pure and Impure Zeal	205
Its Transfer and Establishment in a		The Difficulty of punishing Evil-Doers	206
Lawless Community	189	"They knew not that evil was near	
The Idolater's Distress	190	them"	207
The Religion of Convenience	190	Lessons of Defeat	207
The Mercenary Priest	191	"An Escaped Remnant"	207
The Lost Gods	191	CHAPTER XXI.	
CHAPTER XIX.		War	210
The Downward Progress	194	"There shall not any of us give his	
Troublesome Hospitality	195	daughter unto Benjamin to wife" ...	211
Exceptional Hospitality	195	"In those days there was no king in	
Unparalleled Crime: the Spirit and		Israel: every man did that which	
Method in which its Problems are to		was right in his own eyes" ...	211
be met	196	Sorrow for others	212
Hospitality	196	The Penalty of Desertion	212
Monstrous Wickedness	197	The Return of Peaceful Prosperity ...	213

THE
PULPIT COMMENTARY,

EDITED BY THE

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VICAR AND RURAL DEAN OF ST. PANCRAS, AND EXAMINING CHAPLAIN TO THE LORD
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R U T H.

Exposition and Homiletics

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THE BOOK OF RUTH.

INTRODUCTION.

§ 1. THE STORY.

SOME time during that period of chequered Hebrew history when the Judges ruled, a famine prevailed over the whole land. There was "cleanness of teeth" everywhere. Even the most fertile districts, such as that of which Bethlehem (the house of bread) is the centre, suffered severely. Among the sufferers were a respectable family, consisting of Elimelech, a proprietor in the locality, his wife Naomi, and their two sons, Machlon and Chilion. This family, being hard pressed by the *Hungersnoth*, resolved to emigrate for a season to the adjoining country of Moab, where apparently there was exemption from the widespread agricultural calamity. Accordingly, setting out from the place of their nativity, they reached the place of their destination, and were, it would appear, hospitably welcomed by the inhabitants (ch. i. 1, 2).

Unhappily, however, Elimelech, subject it would seem to some constitutional weakness, was prematurely cut off (ver. 3).

After his decease his two sons married Moabitish wives, called respectively Orpah and Ruth, and all seemed to go well for a season. There was, however, no family, no mirth of little ones, in either home. And in the course of some ten years from their entrance into the land of Moab, both Machlon and Chilion, in consequence apparently of delicacy inherited from their father, sickened and died (vers. 4, 5).

The three widows were left behind, desolate and destitute. The mother-in-law, Naomi, did not see how she could live in comfort, or maintain herself in respectability, in a foreign land. Still less could she see how it would be possible for her to stand between her daughters-in-law and want. Hence she resolved to return to Bethlehem. Her sorrowing daughters-in-law made up their minds to accompany her (vers. 6, 7).

Naomi, however, felt that it would be too great a burden of responsibility

for her to undertake to make her daughters-in-law comfortable in Bethlehem. Hence, after allowing them to give her a convoy for some distance, she insisted that they should return to their mothers' homes, warmly expressing her prayer and her hope that they might soon have sweet and restful homes of their own (vers. 8—13).

The thought of leaving their esteemed and beloved mother-in-law was like a barbed arrow in the heart of both Orpah and Ruth. But at length, after much pleading and remonstrance, Orpah yielded, and returned to her mother (ver. 14). Ruth, however, would not give one moment's entertainment to the proposal. How could she allow the beloved old lady to pursue in solitude her weary way homeward? How could she brook the thought of leaving her to live in solitude after the old home should be reached? Her mind was made up firmly and inflexibly to accompany her much-loved mother-in-law as her companion and attendant. All the nobler feelings of her soul rose, as she thought of her duty, into a heroic mood, while a spirit of deep poetical pathos seized her utterances, as, in unconscious rhythm, she said—

"Insist not on me forsaking thee,
 To return from following thee :
 For whither thou goest, I will go ;
 And wheresoever thou lodgest, I will lodge :
 Thy people is my people,
 And thy God my God :
 Wheresoever thou diest, I will die,
 And there will I be buried.
 So may Yahveh do to me,
 And still more,
 If ought but death part thee and me" (vers. 16—17).

Naomi could insist no more ; and the two widows consequently, with their hearts knit together for ever, wended their weary way toward Bethlehem, which at length they reached. On entering the city gate, travel-worn, and sore, and creeping along the streets in quest of some humble lodging, Naomi was recognised, and soon there was quite a commotion among the matrons and others who had known her of old. The news of her arrival, in the company of an interesting and pensive-looking young woman, flew from house to house, till wondering groups of excited females gathered in the streets, and exclaimed to one another, Is *THAT* NAOMI? The name *Naomi*, which brought up to the mind the idea of the *sweetness of Jah*, suggested for the moment a painful contrast to the sorely-disheartened widow. And hence, in her anguish, she begged the people not to call her *Naomi*, as of old, but *Mara*, inasmuch as the Lord had been dealing very *bitterly* with her (vers. 18—21).

It was fortunately just at the commencement of the barley-harvest that Naomi and Ruth arrived in Bethlehem (ver. 22). Hunger was imminent. Perhaps it had already seized on the two widows, gnawingly. Hence, without delay, Ruth begged permission from her mother-in-law to go out in quest of gleanings. It was humiliating employment, but honest. The permission asked

was granted. And so Ruth went out of the house, passed out of the city gate, and, casting her eyes over the wide expanse of golden fields, right and left, ripe for the sickle, and already alive with reapers and binders and gleaners, she was inwardly guided to a field that belonged to Boaz, a substantial yeoman, and, as it happened, near of kin to the late Elimelech. Ruth knew nothing of his near relationship, but courteously requested from the overseer permission to glean (ch. ii. 1—7). The overseer, perceiving that there was about this petitioner a certain air of superiority that he had never before witnessed in gleaners, got from her some particulars of her history, and made her heartily welcome to take her place on the field (ver. 7). So she went to work "with a will."

By and by, as the dayspring advanced in the sky, the proprietor himself, Boaz, came out of the city to see how his reapers were getting on with their pleasant work. As he reached them and passed along, he courteously saluted them all—*Yahveh be with you!* The grave, kindly courtesy was heartily reciprocated by the workers—*May Yahveh bless thee!* (ver. 4).

His eye speedily caught sight of the elegant and diligent gleaner, and so he directed his steps to the overseer, and asked, *Whose is this young woman?* (ver. 5). The overseer informed him, and praised her modesty and industry. Boaz, passing back again along the row of workers, enjoined on the young men to be respectful to the stranger. Then he went direct toward her, and, addressing her as a father might speak to his daughter, he made her most heartily welcome to continue in his fields as long as the harvest continued (ver. 8). He informed her that he had given strict injunctions to the young men to refrain from all improper freedoms; and he graciously added that she was to avail herself at will of the water which was drawn for the workers, and carried into the field (vers. 4—9).

Ruth was filled with wonder and gratitude for such unexpected favours, and bowed herself in obeisance to the ground (ver. 10).

Boaz was stricken with admiration, and informed her that he had got, with much satisfaction, full particulars of her devoted attention to her mother-in-law. He prayed that she might receive abundant recompense from Yahveh the God of Israel, under the shadow of whose outstretched wings she had come to trust (vers. 11, 12).

As Boaz was about to turn away to attend to his affairs, Ruth ventured, with beautiful respectfulness, to solicit a continuance for the future of that graciousness which he had already showed to her, and which had brought comfort to her heart (ver. 13).

Then they separated. But, at the time of the mid-day siesta and refreshment, Boaz returned to her, and conducted her to the booth, under whose cooling shade all the workers were wont to assemble at mid-day. He requested her to be seated beside the reapers, and to partake of the bread and vinegar which had been provided. He likewise prepared for her a bunch of delicious "parched corn," of

which she gratefully partook, reserving, after she was satisfied, a portion for her mother-in-law to give her a glad surprise (ver. 14).

After the siesta was completed, and Ruth had returned to her labour, Boaz told the reapers to let her glean "even among the sheaves." And not only so, he wished them now and again to pull stalks out of the bundles, with express design, and leave them lying about, that she might gather them. They were, moreover, to be most particular not to affront her by any unkind insinuation (vers. 15, 16).

The work went on merrily till near sunset, when Ruth, collecting together her gatherings, and threshing them, found that she had about an ephah of barley (ver. 17). She took up the welcome load, and made for her humble home, where she had a long story to tell, and many a long story to hear, regarding Boaz (vers. 18—22).

All the harvest through, Ruth continued to glean in the fields of Boaz (ver. 23). But after the reaping and gleaning were ended, and there were no more out-of-door engagements, and no more interviews day after day with Boaz, such a change came over her tender and desolate spirit that the keen eye of her mother-in-law saw that some other step required to be taken. She had had, apparently, interviews with Boaz, and clearly perceived that a mutual attachment had sprung up; but for some reason or other a seal was on his lips. To remove that seal Naomi contrived a plan, which would have been in the highest degree improper had there not been, on the one hand, a peculiar Oriental custom in vogue, and, on the other, absolute reason for absolute confidence in the incorruptible purity of both Boaz and Ruth. The plan was for Ruth to take the position allowed her by the Levirate law. That would at once put Boaz on his honour in reference to the deceased Machlon and the living widow (ch. iii. 1—4). Ruth yielded to her mother-in-law's wishes, and the plan was carried into effect (vers. 5—7). Ruth placed herself by night at the feet of her kinsman while he slept, and, when discovered, was not only heartily welcomed, but warmly commended, and thanked. He was indeed advanced in years, and he could not, for that reason, have ventured to offer himself for her acceptance. But since his age was not to her an obstacle, and she wished to show every possible respect to the deceased, it would be his joy to mingle his lot with hers (vers. 8—11).

There was, however, one obstacle in the way. There was an individual who was nearer of kin than himself to the deceased. According to the Levirate law, that individual had a prior claim on all the prerogatives attaching to priority of kinship; and with these prerogatives were bound up the duties of the nearest of kin. He consequently must, first of all, receive full consideration; and if he insisted on performing the kinsman's part, why then the matter would pass out of the sphere of personal preference, and the result would be accepted as the outcome of the Will that is higher than man's. But if that

nearest kinsman should have no desire to act the kinsman's part, then with joy would Boaz step into his place, and show respect to the deceased (vers. 12, 13).

The watches of the night passed rapidly on, no doubt amid many mutual consultations and explanations. And just as the first thinning of the darkness into dusk gave augury of the coming morning, Ruth rose to return home. She bore a present with her, which would carry its own tangible meaning to Naomi. By and by home would be reached, and Naomi saluted her daughter-in-law by saying, with a peculiar interrogative significance, *Who art thou?* After the whole story was told, "Sit still, my daughter," said Naomi, "until thou know how the matter will end, for the man will not rest until this very day he have brought the affair to its consummation" (vers. 14—18).

It was as Naomi conjectured. Early in the morning Boaz took his place at the gate of the city, and made arrangements for transacting important business in the presence of elders and other witnesses. The near kinsman was passing by. Boaz requested him to be seated, as he had some business to discharge in which they both were interested. The kinsman complied with the respectful request, and ere long a full court of casual witnesses assembled. In the presence and hearing of these elders and others Boaz informed his friend that Naomi, who had lately returned from Moab, had determined, in consequence of reduced circumstances, to sell the property that had belonged to her deceased husband Elimelech (ch. iv. 1—3). He added, "Buy it before the inhabitants of the city, and the elders of the people, if thou art willing to act the kinsman's part." The kinsman intimated that he was willing (ver. 4). Boaz then added that the property would require to be purchased from the hand, not of Naomi only, but of Ruth likewise, the prospective heiress, *who, moreover, was to go with it as a fixed appurtenant*, "in order that the name of her deceased husband might be raised up on his inheritance" (ver. 5).

The anonymous kinsman, however, was not willing to acquire the estate on the terms offered (ver. 6). Hence, perceiving that Boaz was quite willing, he resigned his right in his favour, and pulling off his shoe, handed it to his friend (vers. 7, 8). All the people were witnesses that the nearest kinsman had voluntarily surrendered his peculiar prerogative.

The story thenceforward hastens to its conclusion. Boaz, in presence of the people, acquired the estate, and along with it Ruth, its living and priceless appurtenant (vers. 9, 10). "We are witnesses," shouted the assembled conclave, and then they lifted up their voices and prayed that showers of blessings might descend on the bridal pair (vers. 11, 12). Ruth thus became the wife of Boaz, and bore him a son, whom the matrons who clustered around insisted on calling *Obed*. Naomi took the child to her bosom, and nursed it with tenderness and care which no other care and tenderness could surpass. He was (1) the lineal descendant of Judah, the head of the royal tribe, and (2) the lineal ancestor of David (vers. 13—22).

Taking a broad survey of the contents of the little Book, we may say that it consists of a series of pen-and-ink pictures, or idylls in prose, representing, firstly, the remarkable attachment of a young Moabitish woman, herself a widow, to Naomi, her desolate Hebrew mother-in-law; and, secondly, the remarkable reward with which, in God's providence, her self-sacrifice was crowned.

§ 2. AIM OF THE WRITER.

Edward Topsell, one of the Puritan commentators on the Book, gave, as the leading title of his exposition, 'THE REWARD OF RELIGION,' in that way indicating what he supposed to have been the aim of the writer.

The title is not entirely satisfactory, for certainly it is not the *religion* or *religiousness* of Ruth that is the principal feature of character portrayed in the Book. There is not, it is true, the least shadow of reason for casting the least shadow of suspicion on the genuine piety of the heroine of the story. There is no room for taking exception to her theology. There is still less, if that be possible, for raising objections to her sweet and simple religiousness. Though probably no skilful theologian, she had come to Bethlehem-Judah, to put her trust "under the wings of the God of Israel" (ch. ii. 12). She believed that He "is," and that He is "the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him" (Heb. xi. 6).

Still it is not Ruth's religiousness that is the outstanding feature of the character that is delineated in the Book. It is not her love to the great Divine Object, the God of Israel, that is portrayed. It is her love to a good and worthy human object, Naomi, her mother-in-law. Topsell was right in assigning to *religion* or *religiousness* a higher pedestal than can be accorded to any other devotedness; but he misled himself when, in his eagerness to do homage to that which is highest, he assumed that it was the highest ideal of human character that is bodied forth in the succession of literary photographs which are found in the Book of Ruth.

Many have supposed that the true *raison d'être* of the Book is a matter of genealogy. The ground on which this opinion is maintained is the fact that there is a little bit of genealogy in the five verses with which the Book is wound up. This bit of genealogy connects Pharez the son of Judah with David the son of Jesse. The line passed through Boaz, the husband of Ruth. It is an important historical relationship, more especially to us Christians; for as Christ was "the Son of David," he was the Son of Boaz too, and consequently the Son of Ruth the Moabitess—a Gentile link. The fact is all the more significant and suggestive as, in ascending the genealogical ladder upward to Abraham, the father of the Messianic people, we discover that there were other Gentile links which connected the favoured descendants of the patriarch with the outlying "families of the earth," and which likewise show, in consequence of the moral peculiarity attaching to them, how wondrous was the boon conferred upon men,

when the Lord of glory humbled himself to become the "kinsman" and the "friend" of those whose name is "sinners."

But in the genealogy that is appended to the Book of Ruth, the succession is carried no further down than to King David. The genealogy is thus, so far as the discoverable aim of the genealogist is concerned, rather Davidic than Messianic. The interest in it that was manifestly felt by the writer, and that may have been extensively felt by his cotemporaries, was an interest that gathered round "great David" himself, rather than "great David's greater Son."

Yet it seems preposterous to assume that the whole graphic story of Ruth was composed simply in consequence of this genealogical interest. The assumption looks like an inversion of the natural, and the substitution in its place of the unnatural.

Why not rather suppose that the writer wrote just because he was charmed with the facts of Ruth's character, and because he rejoiced over the reward with which, in the providence of God, the heroine's devotedness was so signally crowned? Why not accept the narrative of the Book as being simply what it appears to be? Why not suppose that the writer may have simply sought to reproduce, in the literature of words, the delineation of character and reward that had already been so charmingly executed in the literature of facts? Why hesitate to assume that he may have undertaken his task in the spirit of literary spontaneity, feeling a wide sympathy in his heart, seeing a meaning in everything, and resting assured that there must be a very peculiar meaning and lesson in all those things that are the outcome of noble effort, noble endurance, and noble love.

The writer must, we conceive, have been, though perhaps unconsciously, and in a comparatively limited sphere of activity, a *true litterateur*. He loved literature for its own sake, and had a true appreciation of its mission and responsibilities. Hence, though a Hebrew, he did not turn aside his eyes and his heart from beholding and admiring facts full of interest, and instruction, because they occurred in connection with an alien race. Nor did he make apologies for finding excellences in Gentiles, and recording them with vivid zest and delight. There is a noteworthy absence of Hebrew bigotry in the spirit of the Book.

The title which is given to his commentary on the book by Richard Bernard, another of the Puritan expositors, brings out admirably what appears to have been the aim of the Hebrew writer—'RUTH'S RECOMPENSE.'

§ 3. THE BOOK'S LITERARY CHARACTER.

The Book of Ruth is not a history; nor is it a biography. It is only a little biographical episode in a history. It is a *story*; but, without doubt, a *true story*.

True? How is that evinced? What is there even to suggest the story's objective truthfulness or authenticity?

Much. The Book comes before us as a narrative of facts; and, although making no parade of its veracity, it has, in its own inimitable simplicity and crystalline transparency, all the appearance of being an honest representation of objective realities.

The material of the story, moreover, is of such a nature that its unreality, if it had not been honest, would at once have been detected and exposed. The stuff out of which the story is woven consisted, so to speak, of very sensitive filaments. It had to do with the genealogy of the royal family. The principal personages in the story were the ancestors of King David.

That there was a Moabitish link in the chain of his genealogy must have been well known to the king himself, and to all his household, and to a large proportion of the people of Israel in general. It must likewise have been well known that this Moabitish link did not lie far back in the line. The existence of such a link was too great a peculiarity to be treated with indifference. We cannot doubt that the whole history of the case would be a frequent topic of narration, conversation, and comment at once within and around the royal court. The probability, therefore, is, that the writer would be careful to do no violence to the facts of the case. Any alloy of fiction or romance on such a subject would have been at once resented, alike by the royal family and by the great body of the people, the devoted admirers of the king.

It is, hence, one should suppose, in a mood of literary waywardness that Bertholdt contends that the Book is *not* a narrative of facts, but merely a "historical fiction"—a family picture painted on a canvas of romance.* The writer, he alleges, has himself betrayed the fact of his work's fictitiousness. "He forgot himself for once," he says.† For although, according to one part of his story, he represents Naomi, with her husband and sons, as reduced to such extremity of poverty that they required to abandon their mortgaged property and take refuge in Moab; yet, in utter forgetfulness of this representation, he introduces Naomi, at a later stage of the story, as saying to the matrons in Bethlehem that "she went out *full*, and came back empty." A mere romance writer, Bertholdt alleges, might easily run into such a contradiction, and care nothing about it; but a narrator of actual facts would speedily have detected the blunder, and have got it rectified. The blunder! It is demonstrably Bertholdt's own. He has, in fact, committed a double blunder. (1) He has misunderstood what is said of the condition of the family before their departure, and (2) he has likewise misapprehended what Naomi said after her return. The family is not represented as reduced to absolute destitution before their emigration; there was abundance of scope for much further descent. And, on the other hand, there is not an

* Section 551 of the 'Einleitung' is entitled "Das Buch enthält reine Dichtung."

† "Der Verfasser hat sich einmal vergessen."

atom of evidence to establish the objector's conjecture, that, when Naomi after her return referred to her 'fulness' before her departure, she had simply her financial condition in view.

§ 4. DATE OF COMPOSITION.

There is not the least likelihood that the little Book could have been written just immediately after the occurrence of the events narrated. For, in the first place, the writer, in the very opening sentence of the Book, comes down beyond the age of the Judges. He speaks of what came to pass "in the days when the Judges judged." It is implied that these days were, by his time, at some considerable distance in the past. Then, in the second place, he speaks in ch. iv. of a custom that "in former time" obtained in Israel in reference to important transactions, involving the transfer of property, or the surrender of property-rights, which custom was observed by Boaz and his kinsman. At the time when the writer lived the custom had become obsolete, so that a considerable period must have elapsed between the date of the events narrated and the date of the narrative of them in the Book of Ruth. Then, in the third place, the genealogy at the close of the Book is carried down to David, and thus far beyond the time "when the Judges judged."

It might be said indeed that the genealogical appendix may have been added by a later hand. True; *it may*. And if it should ever be proved that it has been, then all the logical effects involved in the proof will be willingly conceded. Until, however, the desiderated proof be forthcoming, we may be excused for accepting the Book in its integrity.

No opinion, on the whole, wears a greater aspect of verisimilitude than that which assigns the composition of the Book to the reign of King David. That epoch was among the Hebrews a literary age. The king himself was a man of letters. He would draw literary men around his throne. He was a man, besides, of deep human sympathies; and thus he would no doubt be intensely interested in the Moabitish incident. He would be master of all its details. They had come down to him only through a very limited succession of remembrancers. "Boaz begat Obed; Obed begat Jesse; and Jesse begat David." No wonder that even the conversations and the salient sayings of Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz should have been sharply imprinted on the brief succession of memories.

King David, moreover, was free from many narrownesses of spirit that belittle multitudes of other minds. He recognised the gracious relationship of the God of Israel to all the families of the earth. He believed that there was a tide of goodness and tender mercy flowing from the inexhaustible depths of the Divine heart to all nations and peoples, even to the uttermost parts of the earth. Hence he would not be ashamed of the Moabitish link in his genealogy. He would be proud of it, and all the more, it is likely, because at a

peculiarly critical period of his own history he had been on terms of amity, intimacy, and confidence with the cotemporary king of Moab. At the time when he had to flee for his life from the presence of Saul, and take refuge in the cave of Adullam, it is said, in 1 Sam. xxii. 3, 4, that he went to Mizpeh of Moab, "and said unto the king of Moab, Let my father and my mother, I pray thee, come forth, and be with you, till I know what God will do for me. And he brought them before the king of Moab: and they dwelt with him all the while that David was in the hold." It would not be doing violence to verisimilitude were we to suppose that, in David's communication with the king of Moab, he made mention of the Moabitish link in his genealogy, and of the incidents connected with it. If Ruth, an ancestor of his own, had been hospitably received in Judah, would it be asking too much if the grandson of that ancestor might, with his wife, be hospitably received for a season in Moab?

No other time, it would appear, can be fixed upon as furnishing a more likely date for the composition and publication of the Book.

Not an earlier time; for the custom of pulling off a shoe and giving it to the contracting party was observed in the days of Boaz, but had gone into desuetude at the date of the Book's publication. It could scarcely have died out much sooner than in two or three generations.

Not a later time; for the minute incidents recorded, and the minute conversations and observations reported—all of them apparently unfictitious—would, if unpublished, have faded from the memories of the personages principally concerned. Then the genealogy, at the close of the fourth chapter, *is carried down to King David, and stops there*. Why should it stop there, and by stopping at that particular stage suggest and indicate a particular date? Had the writer some political object in view that required a false date to be given to his publication? There is no trace of such a *motif*. Had he some distinctively theocratic object in view that could be best subserved in his judgment by indicating a false date? There is no evidence of such a *motif*. Had he then some literary object in view that might be furthered by a fabrication, in the colophon, of the date of composition? There is not the slightest evidence of the presence in his mind of such a *motif*.

Ewald, indeed, and Bertheau, following other critics of earlier date, and having themselves many followers of later date, conjecture that the Book is not nearly so old. They would ascribe it to the exilic epoch. Bertholdt asks if it should not be ascribed to the post-exilic epoch.* This, their conjecture of postponement to a date far removed from the time of King David, is based for the most part on considerations that have to do generically with a large proportion of the Old Testament writings. It is hence a question which, falling to be discussed on its own wide arena, is, to a large extent, ruled out of this specific Introduction.

* "Ob es vielleicht gar in die Zeiten nach dem Exil gehört," § 553.

The specific reasons that are adduced in favour of the application of the postponing theory to the particular Book of Ruth are not to us of much or very weighty significance. One is that there are some coincidences of expression discoverable in Ruth, on the one hand, and in the Books of 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings on the other. These coincidences, it is contended, are evidences that the writer of the Book of Ruth must have been acquainted with the Books of Samuel and Kings. For instance, it is said in Ruth i. 17, "May Yahveh do so to me, and more also, if," &c.; and the same formula is found in 1 Sam. iii. 17; 1 Kings ii. 23; xx. 10; 2 Kings vi. 31. Again, it is said in Ruth i. 19, "the whole city got into commotion;" and the same expression occurs in 1 Kings i. 45, where it is rendered in King James's version, "the city rang again." Then in Ruth iv. 4 we read, "I will uncover thine ear" (so as to give thee information); and in 1 Sam. xxii. 8, and elsewhere, it is written, "There is none that uncovereth mine ear" (to inform me). Ewald thinks that "we distinctly hear an echo from the Book of Job, not merely in the general style, but even in some single words and phrases" ('Geschichte,' vol. i. p. 155). He instances Job xxvii. 2, where the simple name "(the) Almighty" is used instead of the complex name "God Almighty" (see Gen. xvii. 1, &c.). Ewald thinks that this shorter form of the name "was evidently rendered possible" in Ruth i. 20 "only through the grand example of the Book of Job." He would infer, therefore, on the one hand, that the writer of the Book of Ruth was familiar with the Book of Job, and he assumes, on the other, that the Book of Job belongs to a late period of literary activity. With the assumption we have here nothing to do. But his inference in reference to the age of the Book of Ruth, and the concurrent inference that is deduced by the advocates in general of exilic or post-exilic origination, from those coincidences of expression of which we have made mention, are surely extremely precarious, or rather absolutely baseless. The simple name "(the) Almighty" occurs not only again and again in Job, but likewise in Gen. xlix. 25, and also in Num. xxiv. 4, 16. If the writer of the story of Ruth must needs be held as borrowing, why might he not have borrowed from Genesis and Numbers in place of Job. And is not the whole argument reversible? Why not infer from coincidences of expression that the writers of the Books of Samuel and Kings borrowed from the Book of Ruth? And, besides, what is to hinder us from supposing that all of the expressions specified lived and moved and had their being for generations as part and parcel of the common idioms of the country, so that various writers of various ages might at pleasure make use of them as constituent elements of the unappropriated language of the people? Peculiar expressions, like peculiar single words, have their lifetime in a people's language. They are born, they grow, they culminate, they wane, grow old, drop off, and are buried. Why might not all the expressions referred to by the critics of the Book of Ruth be "living" at all the successive epochs doing which the writers themselves

were living, from whose writings the coincident words and phrases have been culled?

Ewald thought that he detected evidence of late exilic composition not merely in the echoes of earlier books, but likewise in the "antiquarian lore" that is characteristic of the writer. He refers in particular to the statement that is made in the fourth chapter, in reference to the antique custom of taking off a shoe, and presenting it to the contracting party, when rights of property were surrendered (see ver. 7). He thought, moreover, that such a custom, unearthed by successful antiquarian research, "could only have ceased with the national existence" ('Geschichte,' *ut sup.*). The argument is thus twofold. 1. One branch of it consists in the evidence of successful antiquarian research. 2. Another resolves itself into the peculiarity of the custom itself. It was of such a nature, and manifestly so tenacious of life, that it could not have come to an end so long as the national existence continued.

But surely both of these branches of argumentation are insufficient to carry much weight, or even any weight at all. One might know that a peculiar custom once prevailed, and yet be undistinguished for extensive and accurate "antiquarian lore." The word-of-mouth tradition that sufficed to convey to the writer of the Book of Ruth the actions, and conversations, and remarks of Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz respectively, would likewise suffice to be the vehicle of information regarding the old-fashioned symbolism that was observed when certain legal rights were readjusted. And is it not a matter of well-known fact that legal symbolisms, connected with the transfer of rights of property, *have changed* in various nations whose national existence remains intact? In some nations, for instance, the delivery of land symbolically by the delivery of earth and stones of the land, or other representative elements, though not so very long ago a binding formality, has now ceased to be imperative, or even customary. If there is to be evidence of the exilic or post-exilic composition of the Book of Ruth, it must be found elsewhere.

Some have supposed that this evidence is found in several Chaldaisms of expression. In ch. i. 13, 20; ii. 8, 9, 21; iii. 3, 4; iv. 7, there are certainly some peculiar forms of words. Sanctius supposed that they might be Moabitisms. Dereser conjectured that they might be Bethlehemitish provincialisms. They remind one undoubtedly of forms that are common in Chaldee. But it is at the same time to be borne in mind that there were no hard and fast lines separating, in the olden times, between the various members of the Semitic group of languages. They overlapped one another in various details; and as originally the fathers of the affiliated nations literally lived in one home, so, even after long periods of distinctive linguistic evolution, there were floating about, in waving lines of mutual intercourse, expressions that were in some cases survivals of original unity, and in others the direct result of subsequent familiar contact. One thing is evident, that the Hebrew which is found in the Books

of the Bible, even the oldest of them, is comparatively modern. It is the survival of a much older Hebrew. The manifold verbal abbreviations are evidence (see Raabe's 'Zurückführung des Hebräischen Textes des Buches Ruth auf die ursprünglichen Wortformen'). And nothing is more evident than that the expressions in ch. ii. 8, 9, 21; iii. 3, 4, called Chaldaisms, and not improperly so called, are in reality Hebrew archaisms.

We see then no reason whatever for postponing the date of the Book of Ruth to exilic or post-exilic times. All the weightiest evidence seems to be in the scale that assigns the composition of the Book to the literary age of King David. And yet, even with these strong convictions, we would bear in mind that the real interest of the story is independent of any chronological theory. The Book is a literary gem in ancient Hebrew literature; and it speaks, by what Ewald calls "the pre-eminent beauty of its pictures and descriptions," not to the hearts of Hebrews only, but to universal man.

§ 5. THE AUTHOR.

The authorship is utterly unknown, and guesses need not be multiplied. Many attribute it to Samuel. Abarbanel ascribes it to the writer of Joshua. Others have imagined that Hezekiah, and others still that Ezra, is the author. Heumann thinks that King David himself was the penman. He conceives that any other writer would, in the genealogical table at the close, have given its royal honour to his name. It is too slender and too precarious a basis on which to establish his guess. It is in vain to guess, although we deem it probable that the incidents of the story would be preserved with interest in the family of David, and often narrated within the precincts of his home.

§ 6. THE BOOK'S PLACE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT CANON.

Editors of the Old Testament Canon have freely availed themselves of their right to hold their own opinions, and to act upon them. The Hebrew editors have relegated the little Book of Ruth to the 'Hagiographa,' the group of 'Sacred Miscellanies,' which comprehends, among other works, the Psalms, the Proverbs, Job, the Song of Songs, Lamentations, and Ecclesiastes. In the Hebrew Bibles in current use Ruth stands between the Song of Songs and Lamentations, as if with sorrow on the left hand, and joy on the right. In other editions it stands at the head of the entire group. In the Septuagint, on the other hand, followed by the Vulgate, the Book is found at the close of the Book of Judges, as if it were a little biographical additament to that larger historical work. Origen expressly says that the Hebrews—he must mean the Hellenistic Hebrews—count Judges and Ruth as forming one book.* Luther followed in the wake of the Vulgate, and so did Bishop Miles Coverdale and the

* See Eusebius's 'Ecclesiastical History,' vi. 25.

authors of King James's English version. Hence the Book's position in our English Bibles. We may doubtless assume that Josephus attached the Book to Judges as one parcel, as did Origen's Jews, for we could not otherwise make out his enumeration when, in his 'Cont. Apion,' i. 8, he says that the Hebrew sacred writings consisted of twenty-two books.

§ 7. STYLE OF COMPOSITION.

There is no artistic elaboration in the style. There is not a vestige of aim at fine writing. No whip is laid on the imagination to impart gleam or lustre to what is said. Yet there are in the Book graces of diction that are the native and apparently unconscious outcome of ardent and devoted attachment on the one hand, and of kindly feeling and admiration on the other. The composition is simple, clear, transparent, and with quite a noticeable amount of that additive or aggregative and agglutinative method of joining thing to thing, that is a feature of Hebrew composition in general. There are eighty-five verses in the Book, and yet there are only eight of them that do not commence with the conjunction *and*. Throughout the little Book this earliest of conjunctions occurs about 250 times in all.

§ 8. LITERATURE.

Passing over those expositions of the Book of Ruth which form part and parcel of serial commentaries on the whole, or on certain great sections, of the Bible, it will suffice, for our purpose, to take note almost exclusively of such exegetical, homiletical, and critical works as are monographs, constituting a specialist literature on Ruth.

The annotations of Victorinus Strigel, 1571, and Feuardentius, 1582, are only of antiquarian interest. So, too, are the homilies of Rudolph Gualter, John Wolph, and Ludowick Lavater, who all flourished in the second half of the sixteenth century. All three were famous in their day for Latin sermons, and were, to a remarkable degree, prolific in that kind of literature. Lavater's book on Ruth, for example, contained "homilias xxviii.," and it had, as companion volumes, one on Joshua containing lxxiii. homilies, one on Judges containing ovii., one on Ezra containing xxxviii., one on Nehemiah containing lviii., one on Esther containing xlvi., and one on Job—enough to try a little his readers' "patience"—containing cxli. He was fortunate in finding, for his sermons on Ruth, an English translator of the name of E. Pagett, who published his version in the year 1586.

To these homilies may be added Alexander Manerba's volume, published in Venice, and entitled, '*Peregrinatio Ruth Moabitidis per Commentarium et Sermones descripta*,' 1604; as also Didacus de Celada's '*Commentarii litterales et morales in Rutham*,' with a twofold appendix, '*de Boozi convivio mystico*,

id est, Eucharistico, et de Maria virgine, in Ruth figurata,' 1614. Schleupner's little 'Explicatio,' 1632, need not be overlooked.

To English students the works of Edward Topsell, Richard Bernard, and Dr. Thomas Fuller, all of the seventeenth century, will afford more interest. The first and second are conspicuous for conscientious and earnest elaboration, the third for a delightful might, mastery, and sparkle of thought. Topsell's volume is entitled, 'The Reward of Religion, delivered in sundrie Lectures upon the Booke of Ruth, wherein the godly may see their daily both inward and outward trialls, with the presence of God to assist them, and his mercies to recompense them,' 1613. The author, in his 'Epistle Dedicatorie,' speaks humbly of his "slender studies, which are but as smoak, being compared with the burning coales of others' knowledge." There are certainly but few scintillations in the work. Richard Bernard's work, a quarto, is entitled, 'Ruth's Recompense; or, a Commentarie upon the Book of Ruth, wherein is showed her happy calling out of her owne country and people, into the fellowship and society of the Lord's inheritance, her virtuous life and holy carriage amongst them, and then her reward in God's mercy. Delivered in several Sermons, the brief sum whereof is now published for the benefit of the Church of God,' 1628. Elaborately earnest, and earnestly elaborate, like Topsell's volume, but with more mental grasp in it; albeit, like Topsell's, of scarcely any *exegetical* value. Bernard, unlike Topsell, could emit flashes, and he did emit many of them. But there is often something lurid in them, as when he takes occasion to strike out against "the roaring boys and damned crew"—"the tobacconists, the drunkards, the riotous," who "congee and compliment, or hunt and hawk, and then curse and swear as the furies of hell" (ch. ii. 17). Dr. Thomas Fuller's 'Comment on Ruth,' 1650, unfortunately breaks off at the end of the second chapter. It bears evidence of having been hastily thrown off, but nevertheless it is aglow with wit and bright felicities of illustration and practical application. The commentaries of both Bernard and Fuller were republished in 1865 by James Nichol of Edinburgh.

A different style of book altogether is John Drusius's 'Historia Ruth, ex Ebræo Latine conversa, et commentario explicata. Ejusdem Historiæ Tralatio Græca ad exemplar Complutense, et notæ in eandem,' 1632. The dedication to Archbishop Whitgift is dated Lambeth, 1584. This thin quarto is a gem in its way, so far as the sphere of grammar is concerned. Drusius said of himself, "I am no theologian, and I am not sure whether I am capable of sustaining the character of a grammarian; but," adds he, "I am a Christian."

An invaluable book to the student is John Benedict Carpzov's 'Collegium Rabbini-biblicum in libellum Ruth,' 1703, published in Leipzig. It contains, on verse after verse—(1) the Chaldee Targum of Jonathan, in the original, and translated into Latin; (2) the notes of the lesser and larger Masora, with translations and explanatory annotations; (3) the expositions of the great Hebrew

commentators Rashi and Ibn Ezra, as also of Ibn Melech and others, all in the original, and translated into Latin; and then (4) Carpzov's own elaborate exposition, in which he discusses the views of preceding expositors and critics. The author belonged to a literary family. He himself was John Benedict Carpzov the Second. The latter part of the work was compiled from the author's classroom notes by John Benedict Carpzov the Third, father of John Benedict Carpzov the Fourth, the famous Helmstädt professor of poetry and Greek, who wrote 'Theological and Critical Strictures on the Epistle to the Romans,' and 'Sacred Exercitations on the Epistle to the Hebrews, out of Philo of Alexandria.' The great scholar, Gottlob Carpzov—greater than all the Benedicts—was cousin to John Benedict the Third.

Perhaps the best of all helps for such as have just begun to study Hebrew is Werner's '*Liber Ruth illustratus, duplici quidem interpretatione, quarum altera verba sacra in fonte exhibita de verbo ad verbum exprimit, altera secundum idiotismos linguæ sanctæ,*' &c., 1740. The book is full of sound, old-fashioned scholarship.

To the same eighteenth century belongs C. A. Heumann's '*Spicilegium ad Historiam Ruth,*' 1722—1725. It was published in three successive parts of his '*Pœcile,*' vol. i. pp. 177—187, 353—376; vol. ii. pp. 153—170. Heumann was a Free Lance, and of great capacity; but he was too hasty, too self-assertatory and self-assured, too fond of differing, and too little aware that there is a moral element in literary taste.

Toward the beginning of the same eighteenth century, in 1711, Outhof's '*Exposition of the Book of Ruth,*' in Dutch, was published. It was much prized by his own countrymen for its profusion of erudition. Toward the end of the century, in 1781, John Macgowan's '*Discourses on Ruth, and other important subjects, wherein the wonders of Providence, the riches of grace, the privileges of believers, and the contrition of sinners are judiciously and faithfully exemplified and improved,*' was published. The author, says Mr. Spurgeon, "is well known for originality and force." "The discourses," he adds, "are good reading."

Coming down to the nineteenth century, there is quite a considerable group of practical and homiletical works, such as Lawson's '*Lectures on the whole Book of Ruth,*' 1805; Hughes' '*Ruth and her Kindred,*' 1839; Macartney's '*Observations on Ruth,*' 1842; Dr. Stephen Tyng's '*Rich Kinsman, or the History of Ruth,*' 1856; Aubrey Price's '*Six Lectures on the Book of Ruth,*' 1869; B. Philpot's '*Ruth—Six Lectures,*' 1872; Bishop Oxenden's '*Story of Ruth,*' 1873; and W. Braden's '*Beautiful Gleaner,*' 1874. The oldest of these, viz., Dr. George Lawson's Lectures, is as fresh as the latest. The excellent author had the pen of a ready writer, and, guiding that pen, a large endowment of sanctified common sense. Two other recent works fall to be added to the same group, only the publishing firms from which they are issued desire them, for other than

literary reasons and purposes, to be *dateless*. They are, firstly, Samuel Cox's *Book of Ruth, a Popular Exposition*, and Dr. Andrew Thomson's *Home Life in Ancient Palestine, or Studies in the Book of Ruth*, both of them fresh and charming little volumes.

A very different and much more scholarly group of works consists of such as the following:—Dereser's *Büchlein Ruth, ein Gemälde häuslicher Tugenden. Aus dem Hebräischen übersetzt, erklärt, und für Pfarrer auf dem Lande bearbeitet*, 1806; Riegler's *Das Buch Ruth. Aus dem Hebräischen ins Deutsche übersetzt, mit einer vollständigen Einleitung, philologischen und exegetischen Erläuterungen*, 1812; Mezger's *Liber Ruth ex Hebræo in Lat. versus perpetuaque interpretatione illustratus*, 1856. To these may be added *Ruth ein Familien-gemälde*, in Augusti's *Memorabilien des Orients*, pp. 65—96, 1802; and Umbreit's *Ueber Geist und Zweck des Buchs Ruth*, in the *Studien und Kritiken* of 1834. In this group of works Riegler's volume, in particular, is conspicuous for its taste. The author had a good ear for detecting and appreciating the rhythmic element in the style of the ancient story, and in this respect he anticipated the judgment of Ewald, who takes special note of the rhythmic elevation of the composition in ch. i. 20, 21 for example (*'Geschichte'*, vol. i. p. 154, Eng. trans.).

To this group of expositions we may add, as deserving of special notice for the interpretation of Ruth, Bertheau's *Commentary* in the *Kurzgefasstes exegetisches Handbuch zum Alten Testament*, and the *Commentary* of Cassel, as contained in Lange's *Bibelwerk*. The former appeared in 1845; the latter in 1865. An excellent English translation of the latter, with valuable notes, by P. H. Steenstra, appeared in New York in 1872, as part and parcel of the English reproduction of Lange's *Bibelwerk*.

A very important appendix to the more critical expositions of the Book of Ruth consists of—(1) Charles H. H. Wright's *Book of Ruth in Hebrew, with a critically-revised Text, various readings, &c., including a grammatical and critical Commentary; to which is appended the Chaldee Targum, with various readings, grammatical notes, and a Chaldee Glossary*, 1864. (2) Raabe's *Das Buch Ruth und das Hohe Lied im urtext nach neuester Kenntniss der Sprache behandelt, übersetzt, mit Anmerkungen und einem Glossar versehen*, 1879. The former of these two works will be of the utmost value to young students of Hebrew, as an assistant and guide. The latter is of high philological significance, resting as it does on the most recent lines of linguistic science.

ARRANGEMENT OF THE BOOK IN SECTIONS.

For the purposes of this Commentary the following arrangement into sections has been adopted:—

Section 1 (ch. i. 1—5). A certain Hebrew family, driven by stress of famine, emigrated from Bethlehem to Moab, where still greater trials befell them.

Section 2 (ch. i. 6—14). The widowed mother of the family, Naomi, resolved to return to Bethlehem.

Section 3 (ch. i. 15—22). Ruth, her Moabitish daughter-in-law, attaches herself indissolubly to Naomi; and the two widows, sadly reduced in circumstances, journey on foot to Bethlehem, which they reach at the commencement of the barley-harvest.

Section 4 (ch. ii. 1—9). Ruth obtains permission from her mother-in-law to go out in quest of gleanings, and lighted on the fields of Boaz, a kinsman of her late husband. Boaz met her in the rear of his reapers, and took an instant interest in her.

Section 5 (ch. ii. 10—17). Ruth, profoundly affected by the kindness of Boaz, received from him still greater attention and kindness, and gathered during the day about an ephah of barley.

Section 6 (ch. ii. 18—23). In the evening she returned with her precious load to her mother-in-law, who informed her of the kinship of Boaz, and poured out her heart in thanksgivings to God.

Section 7 (ch. iii. 1—18). At the close of the harvest, Naomi, having watched the growth of an attachment between Boaz and Ruth, adopted the principle of the Levirate law to effect their complete union in heart and hand, and thus to secure a "rest" for her devoted daughter-in-law. The scheme was in all respects successful, and most agreeable to Boaz.

Section 8 (ch. iv. 1—12). As there were, however, some technical obstacles in the way of the union, Boaz took steps to have these honourably surmounted in the presence of the elders of the city, and he succeeded.

Section 9 (ch. iv. 13—22). The bridal of Boaz and Ruth was consummated, and Obed was born, the lineal descendant of Judah, and the grandfather of King David.

THE BOOK OF RUTH.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER I. 1—5.

Ver. 1.—*Now it came to pass.* Or, more literally, “And it came to pass.” The “And” is somewhat remarkable, standing at the commencement of the Book. But as it is also found at the commencement of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 2 Chronicles, Ezekiel, Esther, and Ezra, its use, though inartistic, must be amenable to some literary law. The Books specified, even including Ezekiel, are historical. They are parcels of history, each narrating events that had their genesis in more or less significant antecedent occurrences. This historical genesis, so very different from an “absolute commencement” of things, is indicated, though probably in unreflective spontaneity, by the copulative “And.” *In the days when the judges ruled.* Or, more literally, “when the judges judged.” In primitive times there was no function that was more important for society than that of judiciously settling disputes between man and man. Every such settlement, besides conferring a benefit on society, and in particular on the individuals at variance, would increase the moral influence and social elevation of the judge. By and by his moral and social superiority would, in favourable circumstances, grow into authority, specifically judicial on the one hand, and generically political, or semi-political, on the other. When military prowess and skill in strategy were added, a ruler, champion, or leader would be the result. Many such leaders rose up among the Hebrews ere yet society was compactly organised. They were variously endowed; but most of them were only very partially equipped for the judicious administration of the affairs of the commonwealth. All, however, were called *judges*;

RUTH.

and the discharge of their high duties was denominated *judging*, even when it was entirely inconspicuous as regards judicial ability or judicious determinations. The Hebrew word for *judge* is שופט *shofet*; and it is an interesting evidence of the very close kinship of Hebrew and Phœnician, that in Carthage the chief magistrate, as we learn from Livy and other Roman writers, was called *sufes* (originally, as we see from the inflection, *sufet*). That there was a famine. An admirable though free rendering. In the original the structure of the whole statement is exceedingly primitive and “agglutinative”—*And (it) was in the days of the judging of the judges, and (there) was a famine. In the land.* Namely, of Israel. The non-specification of the particular country referred to is evidence that the writer was living in it, as one at home. Josephus says that it was under the judgeship of Eli, the high priest, that the famine spoken of occurred (*Antiquities*, v. 9, 1). But here the historian speaks “without book,” and without any particular plausibility. Several expositors, such as Bishop Patrick, have antedated, by a very long way, the calculation of Josephus. They would assign the famine to the period when the Midianites and Amalekites came up, “as grasshoppers for multitude, to destroy the land,” so that Israel was greatly impoverished (see Judges vi.). But it is in vain to multiply guesses. The date of the famine is not given, and it is futile to make inquiry for it. *And a certain man.* The interpolation of the individualising word “certain” is quite uncalled for, and now quite archaic. The simplicity of the original is sufficient, “*And a man.*” *Of Bethlehem-judah.* Or, as it might be still more literally represented, “*of Bethlehem, Judah.*” There is no such single name as Bethlehem-judah,

There is only the apposition, for discrimination's sake, of one geographical name to another, just as we may say, in English, *Boston, Lincolnshire*, or *Alexandria, Dumbartonshire*. The localisation of the main name is thus effectually indicated. There is another Alexandria in Egypt; there is another Boston in the United States of America; and there was in Palestine another Bethlehem, namely, in the canton of Zebulun (see Josh. xix. 15). Bethlehem, Judah, lies about six miles to the south of Jerusalem. "Its appearance," says Dr. Porter, "is striking. It is situated on a narrow ridge, which projects eastward from the central mountain range, and breaks down in abrupt terraced slopes to deep valleys on the north, east, and south. The terraces, admirably kept, and covered with rows of olives, intermixed with the fig and the vine, sweep in graceful curves round the ridge, regular as stairs" ("Syria and Palestine," p. 199). The valleys below are exceptionally fertile, and have been so from time immemorial. Hence indeed the name *Beth-lehem*, or *Bread-house*. Its modern name is *Beit-lahm*, or *Flesh-house*. Went to sojourn in the land of Moab. We have no word in English that exactly corresponds to the verb *חָגַג* rendered *sojourn*. The cognate noun is uniformly translated, in King James's version, *stranger*, and means *foreigner*. The verb means *to dwell as a foreigner*, but its root-idea is yet undetermined. The Latin *peregrinari* admirably corresponds. The man of Bethlehem, Judah, went forth from his own country to "peregrinate" (Greek, *παροικῆσαι*) "in the land of Moab;" literally, "in the fields of Moab," that is, "in the pastoral parts of the territory of Moab." It was not a very great way off, this land of his "peregrination." Its blue mountains, rising up luridly beyond the silver thread of the Jordan and the gleaming expanse of the Dead Sea, are distinctly visible from the Mount of Olives and the heights about Bethlehem. **He, and his wife, and his two sons.** The resumptive *he* is employed for the purpose of linking on to him, in his "peregrination," the other members of the little household. He emigrated "along with his wife and two sons." He had fought hard to keep the wolf of hunger from his door, but was like to be beaten. One after another the props of his hope that better days would soon dawn had been swept from under him, and he saw no alternative but to leave for a season the land of his fathers.

Ver. 2.—**And the name of the man was Elimelech.** That is, "God is King," not, as the older critics were accustomed to interpret it, "My God is King." The intermediate *i* is not the possessive pronoun,

but the vowel of union. The name would be originally significant of strong religious sentiments, perhaps mingled with strong political principles. The imposition of it on a son would be something like a manifesto of the father's creed. **And the name of his wife Naomi.** Or rather "No-o-mi." The precise import of the word is not absolutely ascertained; but it is probable that it is somewhat abbreviated in its termination, and means "God is sweet," or, very literally, "Jah is sweetness." It had been originally imposed as a name by some grateful and happy mother, who, by gracious providences, or by other gracious revelations, had been led to think that "sweet are the ways, sweet are the dealings, and sweet is the character of God." The word does not mean *beautiful*, as some suppose; nor *gracious*, as others suppose; nor *my delight*, as others still suppose. It was not intended to describe the character of the person who was to bear the name. It was intended to signalise, in the spirit of a manifesto, a much-prized feature in the Divine character—that feature, namely, that is displayed when "he deals sweetly with men." Gesenius is doubtless right when he makes *sweetness* the fundamental idea of the whole group of affiliated words (see his 'Thesaurus,' *in voc.*). The cognate Hebrew adjective is rendered *sweet* in 2 Sam. xxiii. 1 and Prov. xxiii. 8 (comp. Prov. xvi. 24 and the margin of 2 Sam. i. 23). In the light of this interpretation, and of it alone, can the full significance of what Naomi said on her return to Bethlehem be apprehended: "Call me not *Naomi*, call me *Mara*: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me" (ver. 20). **And the name of his two sons.** In our idiom we should say, "and the names of his two sons." The two sons, however, were for the moment regarded as a unity among the other units of the household. **Mahlon, or rather "Machlon," and Chilion.** We need not dip deeply into the etymological import of these names, or attach to them, as applied to Elimelech's children, any peculiar significance. The names, unlike those of the parents, are devoid of theological tinge, and, in these modern times at all events, their import is liable to endless debate. One would at the first blush of consideration suppose that the one meant *sickness*, and the other *consumptiveness*, or *consumption*—rather uninteresting and melancholy ideas. But they are peculiarly confounding when we consider that the individuals, so named in our story, had apparently inherited a delicate constitution, which developed in both of them into premature *sickness* and *decay*. The names have the aspect of being prophetic. And yet, even though we should assume that Elimelech, in virtue of some

element of bodily delicacy, was afflicted with feelings of morbid despondency, it is hard to come to the conclusion that he would deliberately stereotype his most hypochondriacal anticipations in the names of his children. The probability is, that the names, as names, would originally have some other import. Dr. Cassel supposes that they meant, respectively, *joy* and *ornament*; but he trusts to impossible etymologies. Raabe, taking his cue from Sanscrit roots, interprets the one thus—"He who brings gifts with him;" and the other thus—"He who conceals his wife in his house." Werner, taking his cue from Chaldee cognates, interprets the former of the two names as meaning *ready to forgive*, and the latter as holding forth the idea of *hopeful*. All of them unlikely derivations. And yet something quite distinct from the ideas of *sickness* and *consumption*, but lying so far on parallel lines of thought, may be conceived. The primary import of מַחֲלֹן, the root of *Machlon*, is apparently *to be tender*. Thence the word came by one line of thought to mean *to be physically tender*, that is, *to be sick*; and by another that runs out in Chaldee it came to mean *to be morally tender, to be mild or forgiving*. Machlon may mean *mildness* or *tender-heartedness*. Again, the primary idea of כִּלְיֹן, the root of *Chilion*, is *to complete*. But, besides the completion that is realised in *consuming, consumption, or ending*, there is moral *completeness, the completeness or finish* that is realised in *perfection* (see Ps. cxix. 96: "I have seen an end of all *perfection*"). This idea of *beautiful completeness, or perfection*, is more likely to be the meaning of the name than the idea of *consumptiveness, or consumption*.

Ephrathites of Bethlehem Judah. It is not simply the two sons who are so designated. It is the whole group. They were Ephrathites, that is, Bethlehemites, for the old name of Bethlehem was Ephrath, or Ephratha. As, however, the word Ephrathite also meant Ephraimite (see Judges xii. 5; 1 Sam. i. 1; and 1 Kings xi. 26), it gave precision to the designation, although at the expense of a little redundancy, to say "Ephrathites of Bethlehem Judah." **And they came into the country of Moab.** The Hebrew emigrants reached the *fields or pastoral territory* of Moab. **And continued there.** The phrase in the original is of primitive simplicity—"and were there." It has been asked by theological critics whether Elimelech was justifiable in removing to an "idolatrous country" to avoid the inconveniences of a famine in the land of his nativity. It is enough to say in reply that there is no hint in the text itself

that the step taken was blamable or blamed. "No man ought," says Lawson, "to be condemned, whether dead or alive, without proofs of guilt; and no certain proofs of guilt appear in the present case." "The beam of Elimelech's judgment," says Dr. Thomas Fuller, "is *justly* weighed down to go from Bethlehem, Judah, into the land of Moab."

Vers. 3-5.—"In these words," says Fuller, "we have two marriages ushered and followed by funerals."

Ver. 3.—**And Elimelech Naomi's husband died.** Apparently soon after the settlement of the family. No details, however, are given, as, on the one hand, no blame is attached to the conduct of Elimelech, and as, on the other, the line of biographical interest runs in another direction. **And she was left, and her two sons.** Not only was the mother her husband's *relict*; they were all *left behind*. He had gone somewhither in advance, and they "remained." So the word is frequently rendered.

Ver. 4.—**And they took to themselves wives of the women of Moab.** It was their own act. Josephus, reproducing the narrative from memory, represents the event as occurring in the father's lifetime, and as brought about by his arrangement. He says of Elimelech, "Coming into the territory of Moab, he sojourns there, and, things prospering according to his mind, he gives in marriage to his sons (*ἀγίται τοῖς υἱοῖς*) Moabitish wives." Theological critics have here again raised the question, Was it sinful in these emigrant Hebrews to take in marriage daughters of the land? The Chaldee Targumist did not hesitate in his decision. He begins his paraphrase of the verse thus: "And they transgressed the edict of the word of the Lord, and took to themselves alien wives of the daughters of Moab." Dr. Thomas Fuller represents Naomi as passionately remonstrating with her sons. He says of himself, "My mouth denieth to be the orator of an unjust action." "Nothing can be brought," he adds, "for the defence of these matches. Something may be said for the excuse of them, but that fetched not from piety, but from policy." It is noteworthy, however, that in the text itself, and throughout the entire Book, there is nothing of the nature of condemnation, not the least hint of blame. There was a law, indeed, which laid an interdict upon marriages with Canaanites (see Deut. vii. 3). But these Canaanites occupied a peculiar relation to the Hebrews. They were within the line of that Canaan which had become the land of Israel. Israelites and Canaanites were thus living within the same borders as rival claimants of the same territory. It was no wonder that the Canaanites' claim was not

to be recognised by the Hebrews. The Moabites, however, living within the lines or "coasts" of their own distinct territory, stood in quite a different relation. And while, for purity's sake, great restrictions were to be laid upon all overtures for naturalisation (Deut. xxiii. 3—6), yet the law could never be intended to apply to the families of Hebrews who were settlers in Moab, or to Moabitish females living in their own land, and rather awarding than seeking the prerogatives of natives. The name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth. No doubt native Moabitish names. Much ingenuity has been expended on that of the more interesting person. Some have unwarrantably assumed that *Ruth* is a contraction of the Hebrew word רִחוּץ meaning a *female companion* or *friend*. Still more unwarrantable, though more captivating to the æsthetic imagination, is the signification which is given to the word by Werner and Eadie, namely, *beauty*. It is founded on an impossible derivation from the Hebrew רוּחַ. Still more æsthetically captivating is the conjecture of Cassel, that the name is the ancient Semitic form of the Indo-European word *rodon* or *rose*. "At all events," says he, "the thought of Ruth as *the Rose of Moab* is in itself too attractive not to be proposed as a conjecture." It is certainly most attractive and most admirable as a *jeu d'esprit*, but too imaginative to be vindicated on grounds of comparative philology. And they dwelt there. Or, "settled themselves there;" literally, "sat there." We still call a gentleman's mansion his *seat*. About ten years,

which, however, are treated by the writer as a mere blank in his story. He hastens on.

Ver. 5.—And, to make a long story short, **Maashlon and Chilion died also both of them.** "Like green apples," says Fuller, "cudgelled off the tree." But why "cudgelled"! There is no evidence in the text of Divine displeasure, and the Christian expositor, when going beyond the text in quest of principles, should not forget the tower of Siloam, and the victims of Pilate's bloodthirstiness (see Luke xiii. 1—5). And the woman was left of her two children and of her husband. That is, "of her two children as well as of her husband." She became as it were their *relict* too. She remained behind after they had gone on before. If all sentiment were to be taken out of the expression, it might then be simply said, in very commonplace prose, *she survived them*. Poor woman! "Of the two sexes," says Fuller, "the woman is the weaker; of women, old women are most feeble; of old women, widows most woeful; of widows, those that are poor, their plight most pitiful; of poor widows, those who want children, their case most doleful; of widows that want children, those that once had them, and after lost them, their estate most desolate; of widows that have had children, those that are strangers in a foreign country, their condition most comfortless. Yet all these met together in Naomi, as in the centre of sorrow, to make the measure of her misery pressed down, shaken together, running over. I conclude, therefore, many men have had affliction—none like Job; many women have had tribulation—none like Naomi."

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—5.—*The emigrants and their trials.* We are introduced to the Hebrew family into which the Moabite Ruth was married.

I. THE BEAUTIFUL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE NAMES of both the Hebrew parents.

II. THE WOLF OF HUNGER HAD COME PROWLING TO THE HEBREWS' DOOR. In those conditions of society in which there is little commerce to unite people to people, or when a city is in a state of siege, the consequences of famine are inexpressibly sad and harrowing. Examples:—The recurring famines in India; the famine in Jerusalem when besieged by the Romans, and as narrated by Josephus; the famine in Leyden, when that city was, in 1573, besieged by the Spaniards, and when one of the patriotic magistrates—a noble soul—said to the hungry and mutinous people, "Friends, here is my body. Divide it among you to satisfy your hunger; but banish all thoughts of surrendering to the cruel and perfidious Spaniard." As commerce, however, grows under the fostering care of those Christian influences that aim at realising the brotherhood of all earth's nations, local famines become more and more amenable to control and neutralisation.

III. THE HEBREW FAMILY WAS CONSTRAINED TO EMIGRATE. Many tender ties get ruptured when emigration takes place. But the heart is pulled onward by new hopes. Consider the importance of emigration from old and over-crowded countries to the numerous rich fields lying fallow abroad. These fields are just awaiting the presence of the cultivator to pour forth into the lap of industry

overflowing riches of food for the teeming millions of mother countries, and corresponding riches of raw material for the skilled and skilful hands of manufacturers.

IV. THE EMIGRANTS SEEM TO HAVE GOT A CORDIAL WELCOME IN MOAB. It was creditable to the Moabites. Kindness and sympathy should always be shown to strangers, and to all who are far removed from the sweet influences of home.

V. MORTALITY SOON SADLY RAVAGED THE HEBREW HOME. All are mortal. All must die. But in Christ—"the Resurrection and the Life"—we may get the victory even over death. He has "brought life and immortality to light." He who believeth in Him "shall never see death" (John viii. 51; xi. 26). He "hath," and "shall have," everlasting life.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

On the Book of Ruth.—That the Book of Ruth is included in the canon of Scripture need excite no surprise.

I. IT IS A CHAPTER FROM THE HISTORY OF THE HUMAN HEART. Contrast it with the Book of Judges, to which it is a supplement, and which records feats of arms, deeds of heroism, treachery, violence, and murder. Here we are led aside from the highway of Hebrew history into a secluded by-path, a green lane of private life. Here are simple stories of heart and home. In human life, home, with its affections and relationships, plays an important part. In this Book we have a glimpse into the domestic life of Israel, with its anxieties, sorrows, and sweetness. Women and children, honest work and homely talk; deaths, births, and marriages; loves, memories, and prayers, are all here. The Bible is the book of man as God has made him.

II. IT IS A RECORD OF HUMAN VIRTUE, AND THE PROVIDENTIAL CARE AND REWARD ASSURED TO VIRTUE. Human kindness, filial piety, affectionate constancy, uncomplaining toil, true chastity, sweet patience, strong faith, noble generosity, simple piety—are all here, and they are all observed by God, and are shown to be pleasing to him, who rewards them in due time.

III. IT IS A PROOF OF THE SUPERIORITY OF HUMANITY TO NATIONALITY. The Hebrews are often blamed for intense exclusiveness and bigotry, yet no ancient literature is so liberal and catholic as the inspired books of the Old Testament. This narrative shows no trace of national narrowness; it proves that "God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him." A pure and gentle Moabitess is welcomed into a Hebrew home.

IV. IT SUPPLIES A LINK IN THE CHAIN OF THE GENEALOGY OF DAVID, AND OF THAT SON OF DAVID WHO WAS DAVID'S LORD. Ruth was one of three foreign women whose names are preserved in the table of our Lord's descent from Abraham.—T.

Vers. 1, 2.—*A family of Bethlehem.* This Book is precious as a record of domestic life. The peaceful, prosperous, happy home of the Ephrathite is rather suggested than described.

I. THE TIME AND STATE OF SOCIETY. "The days when the judges ruled." The preceding Book enables us to picture what times of unsettlement, and occasionally of anarchy, these were. The customs of the time were primitive, and the habits of the people were simple. The elders sat at the gates of the little city. Business was transacted with primitive simplicity. The tranquil course of agricultural life diversified by a feast at sheep-shearing, or a mirthful harvest-home.

II. THE SCENE. "Bethlehem-judah." The fields of Bethlehem, in the territory of Judah, are among the classic, the sacred spots of earth. 1. In Old Testament history. The home of Boaz; the scene of Ruth's gleaning, and of her marriage. In these pastures was trained, in the household of Jesse, and among his stalwart sons, the youthful David, who became the hero and the darling, the minstrel and the king, of Israel. 2. In New Testament history. Between the pastures of Bethlehem and the stars of heaven was sung the angels' song of good-will and peace. Here

was born the Son of David, who was the Son of God. The visit of the shepherds and the wise men. Herod's massacre of the babes, &c.

III. The PURSUITS of rural life. In Bethlehem-Ephrathah Elimelech had his inheritance. Here, for a time, he, like his fathers, tilled the fields and fed the flocks he owned in peace. Even in times of trouble and disorder some secluded spots are quiet; the bleating of the sheep is familiar, and the shouts of war are unheard. In most men's breasts the scenes and pursuits of rural life are cherished; perhaps it is hereditary. "God made the country." A simple and natural piety is fed by fellowship with nature, the work of God's own hands.

IV. The PEACEFUL JOYS of home. In the sweet society of his wife Naomi ("the pleasant"), his young sons Mahlon and Chilion, growing by his side in stature and intelligence, the freeholder of Bethlehem passed the jocund days. How can we think and speak quite worthily of the *family* and the *home*? Here is the Divine nursery of the soul, the Divine school of life! Let us have no terms with the fanatics who would reconstruct society upon another basis than domestic life. The great lesson—gratitude to Providence for peace, congenial occupation, and a happy home.—T.

Vers. 1, 2.—*Famine and impoverishment.* The former scene one bright and joyous. An honest Hebrew, of the tribe of Judah, living upon the land of his inheritance, with the wife of his heart and the children of his youth. Thus were formed the bonds which prosperity could not dissolve and adversity could not snap. Here were learned the hereditary and traditional lessons of faith, patience, forbearance, piety, and hope. A contrast follows.

I. FAMINE. Probably from some incursion of the hostile forces of Midian into the vale of Bethlehem; or, if not so, from a succession of bad harvests, or a failure of pasture, scarcity and famine invaded the abodes of plenty and of peace.

II. IMPOVERISHMENT. Upon Elimelech the pressure of the times was peculiarly severe, compelling him to break up his home, quit the modest but cherished inheritance of his fathers, and seek subsistence elsewhere.

Lessons:—1. Change of circumstances is a common incident in human life. Every person has either experienced some such change, or has witnessed such reverse in the condition of kindred or acquaintance. A fall from comfort, or even affluence, to poverty frequently happens among occupiers, and even owners, of land, and still more frequently in manufacturing and commercial communities. 2. Religion teaches sympathy with those in reduced circumstances. When a neighbour is deprived not only of the usual conveniences of life, but of the means of educating his children and of providing for his old age, we should not offer reproach, or even cold, hard advice, but, if possible, substantial help, and always considerate sympathy. 3. Religion has consolation for those in adversity. A message from heaven bids them "be of good cheer!" Let diligence and frugality contend with circumstances! Be patient and uncomplaining, and avoid that sign of a petty and broken spirit, the dwelling fondly upon bygone prosperity! The sun of prosperity may yet break through the clouds. Even if it be not so appointed, there may still remain those blessings which are dearer than fortune's gifts—wife, child, a good conscience, health, fortitude, hope! If calamity has come upon you through your own fault, repent, and learn "the sweet uses of adversity." If through the fault of others, refrain your heart from malice and revenge, and your lips from cursing. Think rather of what Heaven has left than of what Heaven has taken. "Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven." Remember that, if Christians, "all things are yours!"—T.

Vers. 1, 2.—*Emigration.* Picture the removal of this family from the home they loved. Taking with them, it may be, the remnant of their cattle, they bade adieu to the familiar scenes where they had known content and plenty, where they had formed their friendships and alliances. The best prospect for them lay towards the east, and eastwards accordingly they travelled. Whether they struck southwards by the foot of the Salt Sea, or crossed the Jordan at the ford, they must soon have reached the verdant highlands of Moab. Here it was they were to seek a settlement and make a home.

I. THESE CHANGES OF abode are IN ACCORDANCE WITH PROVIDENTIAL APPOINTMENT. Migrations have at all times been common among pastoral, nomadic people. The tillers of the soil and the dwellers in cities have been more stationary. Emigration a great fact in the social life of Britain in our time. Owing to the increase of population, to geographical discovery, to the application of steam to ocean voyages, emigration common among our artisan and agricultural classes. Some become colonists through the pressure of the times; others from love of adventure, and desire for a freer life. All of us have friends who have emigrated. Thus God replenishes his earth.

II. THESE CHANGES AFFECT DIFFERENTLY DIFFERENT PERSONS. Naomi would feel the severance most keenly, and would look forward with least interest and hope to new surroundings and acquaintances. Her sons would not realise the bitterness of change; the novelty of the circumstances would naturally excite and charm them. Picture the emigrants, the friends they leave behind, the scenes awaiting them, &c.

III. THESE CHANGES SHOULD BE WATCHED BY CHRISTIANS WITH WISE AND PRAYERFUL INTEREST. Remember that the undecided are yonder free from many restraints. By prayer and correspondence seek to retain them under the power of the truth. Guide emigration into hopeful channels; induce colonists to provide for themselves the word of God, the means of education, the ministry of the gospel.—T.

Ver. 3.—Widowhood. In the country of Moab Elimelech and his family found a home. A period of repose seems to have been granted them. They learned to reconcile themselves to new scenes and associations. But life is full of vicissitude. "Boast not thyself of to-morrow." O, to live as those whose treasure and whose heart are above! "Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died; and she was left." A brief, pathetic record!

I. The widow's SORROW. The observation of all, the experience of some hearers, may fill up the outline. In every social circle, in every religious assembly, are women who have been called upon to part with those upon whom they had leaned for support and guidance, to whom they gave their hearts in youth, to whom they had borne sons and daughters.

II. The widow's LOT. It is often one of hardship and trouble. As in the case before us, it may be aggravated by—1. Poverty. 2. Distance from home and friends. 3. The charge and care of children, who, though a blessing, are a burden and responsibility.

III. The widow's CONSOLATION. 1. The promise of God: "Thy Maker is thy husband." 2. Opportunity of Christian service. How different the widow's condition in Christian communities from that of such among the heathen! The honour and the work of "widows indeed."

Lessons:—1. Submission and patience under bereavement. 2. Sympathy with the afflicted and desolate.—T.

Ver. 4.—Marriage. The notes of time found in this narrative are meagre. It is not easy to decide to what the "ten years" here mentioned refer. After the death of Elimelech, the two sons were spared to be the occupation and the solace of the widow's life. Naomi saw them grow up to manhood. Then the young men "took them wives of the women of Moab."

I. MARRIAGE IS LAWFUL BETWEEN PERSONS OF DIFFERENT NATIONS. There was nothing in the law of Moses to prevent these young men from acting as they did, although the children of Israel were not allowed to intermarry with the Canaanites. Later in Jewish history Nehemiah interpreted the law as forbidding marriage with the children of Moab. But he seems to have acted with unjust severity. These Moabitish women were virtuous, kind, devoted; conformed to the religion of their husbands, and one of them found a solid satisfaction in the worship of Jehovah. The conduct of the young men seems to have been natural and blameless.

II. MARRIAGE SHOULD ONLY BE ENTERED UPON AFTER SERIOUS AND PRAYERFUL DELIBERATION, AND WITH A CONVICTION OF ITS ACCEPTABLENESS TO GOD. Sensible and Christian people should discountenance the practice of treating marriage with levity. Consideration should be given to time, to circumstances, and, above all, to

character. Confidence and esteem must be, with affection, the basis of wedded happiness; and these cannot exist in their completeness where there is dissimilarity of conviction and aim—where one party is living to the world, and the other would live unto the Lord. Error here involves misery, and perhaps disaster and ruin.

Lessons:—1. Let elders inculcate just views of the marriage relationship upon the young. 2. Let the young avoid committing themselves to a contract of marriage until a fair experience of life has been acquired. 3. Let Christians marry “only in the Lord.”—T.

Ver. 5.—*Double desolation.* In the happiness of her children Naomi would revive the happy years of her own early married life. But the bright sky was soon clouded over by the shadow of death. Perhaps inheriting their father's constitution, her sons died in early manhood. She became a childless widow. Three widows were in one house, each bearing in her silent heart her own burden of grief.

I. SOME ARE CALLED UPON TO ENDURE REPEATED BEREAVEMENTS. Households there are which have been visited again and again by the angel of death. Youthful lives are snapt asunder; youthful hearts are left desolate. Some are called upon to endure prolonged age, whilst children and friends, the joy of their hearts, are taken from them. Here and there is one who can exclaim, “All thy waves and thy billows are gone over me.”

II. FOR SUCH GOD HAS PROMISES OF GRACE AND PURPOSES OF MERCY. 1. The assurances of the Divine remembrance and kindness. “The mountains shall depart,” &c. 2. The sympathy of the Divine High Priest. The miracle of the raising of the widow's son at Nain is an illustration. 3. Grace of submission shall be imparted. “The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.” 4. Intentions of Divine wisdom shall be accomplished. Thus shall the heart be weaned from earth; thus shall Christian character be matured; thus shall saints be prepared for glory. How can the vicissitudes of life be borne by those who are strangers to Christian principles, to Christian consolations, to Christian hopes? May ours be the happy lot of the Christian, from whom (as from all the children of men) the future is hidden; but who knows himself to be the object of a Father's love and a Saviour's care, and to whose heart comes day by day a voice from heaven, saying, “I will never leave thee! I will never forsake thee!”—T.

Ver. 1.—“In the days when the judges ruled.” This is the age in which the story happened which constitutes Ruth's history, beautiful as an epic, and touching as a pathetic drama of home life. The judges. Whether the earlier or later we know not. Whether in the days of Deborah or the days of Gideon. Probably, however, the latter, as history tells then of a famine through the invasion of the Midianites. The judges. Religion means law, order, mutual respect, and, with all diversity of circumstance, equality in the eyes of the law. A nation that perverts justice has undermined the foundations of the commonwealth.

I. ALL JUDGES ARE REPRESENTATIVES AND INTERPRETERS OF THE LAW. They are not creators of it; they are not allowed to govern others according to their own will, but they are to be fair and wise interpreters of the national jurisprudence. Law is a beautiful thing if it is founded on the Divine sanctions; it means protection for the weak, safety for the industrious.

II. THE BEST ADMINISTRATION CANNOT MEET THE WANT CAUSED BY WARS. Famine came! The Midianites came up and “destroyed the increase of the earth.” “And Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites.” Here are the old border wars. Nature was as beautiful as ever, and the flowers of Palestine as fragrant, and the corn as golden; but the enamelled cup of the flower was soon filled with the blood of slaughter, and the beautiful sheaves were pillaged to supply the overrunning enemies of Israel. Such is the heart of man. In every age out of that come forth wars; and although modern legislation is enabled to fill the empty granary from other shores, yet in the main it still remains true, war means, in the end, not only bloodshed and agony, but want.

III. ALL EARTHLY RULERSHIP IS THE SYMBOL OF A HIGHER GOVERNMENT. As the

fatherly relationship is symbolical of the Divine Fatherhood, and the monarchical of the Divine King, so the earthly judge is to be the emblem of a Divine Ruler, whose reign is righteousness, and who hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world. There are schools of thought that question human responsibility, that teach a doctrine of irresistible law, the predicate of which is, that sin is not so much criminal or vicious, as the result of innate tendencies which come under the dominion of resistless inclinations. But it is to be noticed that these teachers would not excuse the thief who has robbed *them*, or the murderer who has slain *their* child. To be consistent, however, they ought; for they object to punishment in the plan of the Divine government. Human instinct, however, and Divine revelation are at one in this; alike they ask, "Wherefore should a man complain, a man for the punishment of his sin?" In all ages and amongst all races where society is secure, and progress real, and innocence safe, they are "those where the judges rule."—W. M. S.

Ver. 1.—"There was a famine in the land." Providence led Elimelech, his wife Naomi, and his two sons Mahlon and Chilion, into the land of Moab, on the other side of Jordan. Whilst there was scarcity of bread in Israel, there was plentiful supply in Moab. So they left their fatherland and home in Bethlehem. We carry "home" with us when we go with wife and children. It is the exile's solitary lot that is so sad. It is when God setteth the solitary in families, and the child is away from home in a foreign land, amongst strange faces, that the heart grows sick. We ought always to remember in prayer the exile and the stranger. Sometimes, amongst the very poor, a man has to go and seek substance far away from wife and child; but in this case sorrow was mitigated by mutual sympathy and help.

I. THERE ARE WORSE FAMINES THAN THIS. It was famine of another sort that led Moses from Egypt, when he feared not the wrath of the king, that he might enjoy the bread of God; and it was religious hunger that led the Pilgrim Fathers first to Amsterdam, and then to New England, that they might find liberty to worship God. In the day of famine we read Elimelech could not be satisfied. No. And it is a mark of spiritual nobility never to be contented where God is dishonoured and worship demoralised. The word "Bethlehem" signifies the house of bread; but there was barrenness in the once wealthy place of harvest. And the name of Church cannot suffice when the place is no longer the house of God, which the word Church means.

II. IN THIS FAMINE ELIMILECH'S NAME WAS A GUARANTEE OF GUIDANCE AND SUPPLY. It means, "My God is King." Beautiful that. He reigns, and will cause all things to work together for good. Mark the words, My God; for as Paul says, "My God shall supply all your need." King! Yes, "the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof," and he will not let his children want bread. They go without escort, but the Lord goes before them. There are no camels or caravanserais behind them, but the Lord God of Israel is their reward. So is Divine promise translated into family history.

III. THE TROUBLE THAT SEEMS LEAST LIKELY OFTEN COMES. Bread wanting in Bethlehem, "the house of bread." Yes! But have not we often seen this? The sorrows of life are often such surprises. They do not take the expected form of the imagination, but they assume shapes which we never dreamed of. The king not only loses his crown, but becomes an exile and a stranger in a strange land. The rich man in health loses all in a night. A sudden flicker, and the lamp of health which always burned so brightly goes out in an hour.

IV. BETHLEHEM WAS A QUIET, RESTFUL ABODE. Nestling in its quiet beauty, ten miles or so from time-beloved Jerusalem, who would have thought that the golden ring of corn-fields which surrounded it would ever have been taken off its hand? Very early in history it was productive. Here Jacob fed his sheep in the olden times. Famine in a city impoverished and beleaguered we can understand; but famine in Bethlehem! So it is. The rural quietness does not always give us repose. There too the angel with the veiled face comes—the angel of grief and want and death. Happy those who have a Father in heaven who is also their Father and their King.—W. M. S.

Vers. 4, 5.—*A foreign land.* "And they dwelled there about ten years." Memorable years! Marriages and births had given place to separation and bereavement. Elimelech the father died; so also did the two sons Mahlon and Chilion. Thus we have the sad picture of three widows.

I. WE CAN FLY FROM FAMINE, BUT NOT FROM DEATH. We need not enter upon the argument of some expositors, as to whether Elimelech did right to leave Bethlehem; whether by famine is not meant insufficiency of plenty rather than actual want. We must be content with the fact that he thought it prudent and wise to go. And now with fulness of bread came the saddest experience of all. How often it happens that when circumstances improve, those we hoped to enjoy them with are taken away. We climb the hill together, and then with new and fair prospect comes the desolation of death amid the beauties and blessings of earth and sky. These are darker clouds than covered them in Bethlehem. We never know how dear are the living till they are gone; then we see it was their presence that gave life and peace to so many scenes, that gave inspiration to labour and sweetness to success.

II. TROUBLES OFTEN COME WAVE UPON WAVE. Ten years! and lo, three out of the four pilgrims are at rest. No more fatigue, no more distress for them. True; but those that are left! What of them? It is often easier to go than to remain. It is all summed up in the consciousness, I have but to live, and to live without them. Nor is this a morbid feeling. It is a most sacred emotion. True, time will alleviate; but there will always be graves in the heart, and men and women who have lost their beloved ones can never be the same again. Character will be softened, purified, elevated. Heaven will be nearer and dearer to the heart. Ten years! How fleetly they fly, and yet what a long volume of experience may be bound up in them.

III. EVERY HOME IS BUT AS A TENT LIFE. They dwelled there. Got used to the new people, the new skies, the new ways. After a time, to a family removed to another shore, there are always some tendrils gathering round the place, and in time they feel in leaving *that* a sense of loss. Strange as it all seemed at first, in time touches of experience make it homelike to them. Still the old first home, the dear village of childhood and youth, nestles in the heart. How many in life's evening like to go back and live near the abode of the morning. We dwell! So it seems; and we look at the picture of the world's life-pilgrimage as though, like some panorama, it was all *outside* us. But we pass onward too, and ere long grey hairs are here and there upon us, though we know it not. At times we look back. Ten years! And their experience is within us, as well as behind us.—W. M. S.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER I. 6—14.

Ver. 6.—Then—the conjunction in Hebrew is the common generic copulative *and*—*she arose*. She had been *sitting*, as it were, where her husband had settled, and she now rose up to depart (see ver. 4). *She, and her daughters-in-law*. The word for "her daughters-in-law"—*וְהַבָּתְּלוֹת*—is literally "her brides," that is, the brides of her sons. *That she might return*—an admirable rendering into English idiom. The phrase in the original is simply "and she returned," that is, "and she began to return." *From the country of Moab: for she had heard in the country of Moab how that the Lord had visited his people in giving them bread*. Or, more literally, "for she heard in the country of Moab that Jehovah"—or, rather, "Yahveh," or, as Epiphanius gives it, *יְהוָה*—"had visited his people to give them bread." There is no warrant, however, and no need,

to add, with the Chaldee Targumist, that the news was conveyed *by the mouth of an angel*. And the representation is not that Yahveh, in giving bread to his people, had thereby visited them; it is that he had visited them "to give them bread." The word *בָּרַךְ*, rendered *visited*, is quite peculiar, with no analogue in English, German, Greek, or Latin. Yahveh had *directed his attention* to his people, and had, so to speak, *made inquiry into their state*, and had hence taken steps to give them bread (see Exod. iii. 16; iv. 31). They had already got it, or, as the Septuagint translates, they had got *loaves* (*ἀρτοι*). The Vulgate translates it *meats* (*escas*). It is assumed in the tidings that the seasons and their products, and all beneficent influences in nature, belong to Yahveh. It is likewise assumed that the Hebrews were his people, albeit not in such a sense as to secure for them more "bread" and "milk and honey" than other peoples

enjoyed. Their chief prerogatives were spiritual and moral. *They were his Messianic people.* That is the key to unlock the secret of the whole Old Testament Scriptures.

Ver. 7.—And so she went forth out of the place where she was. There is no attempt on the part of the writer to localise the spot. And her two daughters-in-law with her. They had kept, it seems, on terms of affectionate sympathy with their mother-in-law. The jealousies that so often disturb the peace of households had no place within the bounds of Naomi's jurisdiction. The home of which she was the matronly centre had been kept in its own beautiful orbit by the law of mutual respect, deference, affection, and esteem—the law that insures happiness to both the loving and the loved. "If there were more Naomis," says Lawson, "there might be more Orpahs and Ruths." And they went on the way to return to the land of Judah. Having left her Moabitish abode, and got into the frequented track which led in the direction of her native land, she journeyed onward for a stage or two, accompanied by her daughters-in-law. Such is the picture. It must be subsumed in it that her daughters-in-law had made up their minds to go with her to the land of her nativity. The subject had been often talked over and discussed. Naomi would from time to time start objections to their kind intention. They, on their part, would try to remove her difficulties, and would insist on accompanying her. So the three widows journeyed onward together, *walking*. Adversity had pressed hard on their attenuated resources, and they would not be encumbered with burdensome baggage.

Ver. 8.—And Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, Go, return each to her mother's house. She reverted, with deeper earnestness, to their theme of discussion. She acknowledged that most kindly had they acted toward her. Her heart was filled with gratitude. It was likewise agitated with grief at the prospect of bidding them a final farewell. Nevertheless, she felt that it would be unreasonable and unkind to invite them to be, to any further degree, sharers of her adversity. Hence, thanking them for their loving convoy, she would remind them that every step further on would only increase the length of their return-journey; and she said, Go, return each to her mother's home. There, in the females' apartment, and in the bosom of their mothers, they would surely find a welcome and a refuge. She judges of their mothers by herself, and she refers rather to them than to their fathers, partly, perhaps, because she bears in mind her own motherhood, but principally, no doubt, because, in

those Oriental countries, it lay very particularly within the province of mothers to make arrangements in reference to their daughters. *May Yahveh deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the deceased, and with me.* It is beautiful gratitude, and at the same time a touching monument to the faithfulness and gentleness that had characterised and adorned the young widows. Her simple Hebrew theology, moreover, comes finely out. She assumes that her own Yahveh reigned in Moab as in Judah, and that all blessing descended from him. There is a little peculiarity in the Hebrew pronouns in this clause. They are masculine instead of feminine. The influence of the stronger sex overrides grammatically, for the moment, the influence of the weaker.

Ver. 9.—*May Yahveh grant to you that ye may find rest, each in the house of her husband.* Naomi again, when the current of her tenderest feelings was running full and strong, lifts up her longing heart toward her own Yahveh. He was the God not of the Hebrews only, but of the Gentiles likewise, and ruled and overruled in Moab. The prayer is, in its form, full of syntactical peculiarity: "May Yahveh give to you," and, as the result of his giving, "may you find rest, each [in] the house of her husband." The expression, "the house of her husband," is used locatively. It is an answer to the suppressed question, "Where are they to find rest?" And hence, in our English idiom, we must insert the preposition, "*in* the house of her husband." As to the substance of the prayer, it has, as truly as the grammatical syntax, its own tinge of Orientalism. Young females in Moab had but little scope for a life of usefulness and happiness, unless shielded round and round within the home of a pure and devoted husband. Naomi was well aware of this, and hence, in her motherly solicitude for her virtuous daughters-in-law, she gave them to understand that it would be the opposite of a griet to her if they should seek, in the one way open to them in that comparatively undeveloped state of society, to brighten the homes of the lonely. In such homes, it circumstances were propitious, they would find deliverance from unrest and anxiety. They would find *rest*. It would be a position in which they could *abide*, and in which their tenderest feelings and most honourable desires would find satisfaction and *repose*. The peculiar force of the Hebrew מנוחה is finely displayed by the texture of the associated expressions in Isa. xxxii. 17, 18: "And the work of righteousness shall be *peace*; and the effect of righteousness *quietness and assurance for ever*; and my people shall dwell in a *peaceable habitation*, and in *sure dwellings*, and in *quiet resting-places*"

(וַתִּנָּשֶׁק). And she kissed them, locking them lingeringly and lovingly in a farewell embrace. "Kissed them." The preposition *to*, according to the customary Hebrew idiom, stands before the pronoun. In kissing, Naomi imparted herself passionately to her beloved daughters-in-law, and clung to them. There would be full-hearted reciprocation, and each to each would cling "in their embracement, as they grew together" (Shakespeare, *Henry VIII.*). And they lifted up their voice and wept. The idea is not that all three wept aloud. The pronoun "they" refers to the daughters-in-law, as is evident both from the preceding and from the succeeding context. The fine idiomatic version of the Vulgate brings out successfully and unambiguously the true state of the case—*quæ elevata voce flere cœperunt*. The lifting up of the voice in weeping must be thought of according to the measure of Oriental, as distinguished from Occidental, custom. In the East there is less self-restraint in this matter than in the West.

Ver. 10.—And they said unto her, Surely we will return with thee unto thy people. So King James's version. The expression in the original is broken at the commencement: "And they said to her, For with thee we shall return to thy people." It is as if they had said, "Do not insist on our return to our mothers' homes, for with thee we shall return to thy people." Note the expression, "we shall return," instead of "we shall go with thee in thy return to thy people." For the moment they identify themselves with their mother-in-law, as if they had come with her from Judah.

Ver. 11.—And Naomi said, Turn back, my daughters. To what purpose should you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb, that might be husbands to you? According to the old Levirate law—a survival of rude and barbarous times—Orpah and Ruth, having had husbands who died without issue, would have been entitled to claim marriage with their husbands' brothers, if such surviving brothers there had been (see Deut. xxv. 5—9; Matt. xxii. 24—28). And if the surviving brothers were too young to be married, the widows, if they chose, might wait on till they reached maturity (see Gen. xxxviii.). It is in the light of these customs that we are to read Naomi's remonstrances. The phraseology in the second interrogation is very primitive, and primitively 'agglutinative.' "Are there yet to be sons in my womb, and they shall be to you for husbands?" (see on ver. 1).

Ver. 12.—Turn back, my daughters, go; for I am too old to have a husband. But even if I could say, I have hope; yea, even if I had a husband this very night; yea, even if I had already given birth to sons;

(ver. 13) would ye therefore wait till they grew up? would ye therefore shut yourselves up so as not to have husbands? nay, my daughters; for my lot is exceedingly bitter, more than even yours, for the hand of Yahveh has gone out against me. Most pathetic pleading, and not easily reproduced on lines of literal rendering. "Go, for I am too old to have a husband." A euphemistic rendering; but the original is euphemistic too, though under another phraseological phase. "But even if I could say, I have hope." The poverty of the Hebrew verb, in respect of provision to express "moods," is conspicuous: "that," *i. e.* "suppose that I said, I have hope." Mark the climactic representation. *Firstly*, Naomi makes, for argument's sake, the supposition that she might yet have sons; then, *secondly*, she carries her supposition much higher, namely, that she might that very night have a husband; and then, *thirdly*, she carries the supposition a great deal higher still, namely, that even already her sons were brought forth: "Would you therefore wait?" Note the *therefore*. Ibn Ezra, the Septuagint, the Vulgate, and King James's version assume that *וְהָיָה* means for *them*. The feminine pronoun, however, as applied to Naomi's sons, is, on that supposition, all but inexplicable. It is much better to assume, with the majority of modern critics, that it is equivalent to *וְהָיָה*, whether we call it a Chaldaism or not. Certainly it was current in Chaldee (see Dan. ii. 6, 9). But it may have floated in circles of Semitic society that were never included within Chaldaea proper. Indeed, there were no precise limits bounding off the Chaldee language from the kindred dialects, just as there are no such limits in English or in German, or in any member of a linguistic group. Idioms often overlap. In the two interrogative clauses, "Would ye for that purpose wait till they grew up? Would ye for that purpose seclude yourselves, so as not to have husbands?" there is a parallelism; only, in the second clause, the representation rises. "For my lot is exceedingly bitter, more than even yours;" literally, "for it is bitter to me exceedingly, beyond you." The verb is used impersonally. Naomi means that her case was even more lamentable than theirs, so that she could not encourage them to hang their dependence on her help, or to hope for a retrieval of their circumstances in becoming partakers of her fortunes. The translation of King James's version, "for your sakes," though decidedly supported by the Septuagint, is unnatural. Pagnin and Drusus both give the correct rendering, "more than you." So do Michaelis and Wright. But Bertheau and Gesenius agree with King James's ver-

sion. The Syriac Peshito, strange to say, gives both translations, "I feel very bitterly for you, and to me it is more bitter than to you."

Ver. 14.—**And they**, the daughters-in-law, **lifted up their voice** in unison and unity, as if instead of two voices there had been but one. Hence the propriety of the singular number, as in ver. 9. **And wept again**. The "again" doubles back on the statement in ver. 9. With uplifted voice, in shrill Oriental wail, and amid streams of tears, they bemoaned their hapless lot. Then, after the paroxysm of grief had somewhat spent itself, Orpah yielded to her mother-in-law's dissuaves, and at length imprinted on her, reluctantly and passionately, a farewell kiss. Then, not waiting to ascertain the ultimate decision of Ruth, or rather, perhaps, having now a fixed presentiment what it would be, she moved regretfully and tearfully away. She was afraid, perhaps, that if she, as well as Ruth, should insist on accompanying her mother-in-law, the two might be unreason-

ably burdensome to the aged widow. Perhaps, too, she was not without fear that her own burden in a foreign land, amid strangers, might be too heavy to be borne. There is not, however, the slightest need for supposing that she was, in any respect, deficient in attachment to her mother-in-law. **But**, it is added, **Ruth clave to her mother-in-law**, all reasonings, remonstrances, dissuaves on Naomi's part notwithstanding. Ruth would not be parted from her. "Clave." It is the same word that is used in the primitive law of marriage. "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall *cleave* to his wife, and they shall be one flesh" (Gen. ii. 24). It occurs again in Ps. lxiii. 8: "My soul *followeth hard* after thee;" and in Ps. cxix. 31: "I have *stuck* to thy testimonies." Joshua said, "*Cleave* unto the Lord thy God" (Josh. xxiii. 8); and many have had sweet, while others have had bitter, experience of the truth that "there is a friend that *sticketh closer* than a brother" (Prov. xviii. 24).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 6—14.—*Longing for the old home*. Brings to view (1) Naomi's resolution to return to the land of Judah, and then it records (2) a touching scene that occurred at her departure.

I. NAOMI'S RESOLUTION. No wonder that she formed it; for—1. The ties that bound her to the land of Moab had been snapped by the hand of death. In the death of her *husband* there was the disruption of the *house-band*. In the deaths of her two sons who had become *husbands*, the only other *bands* or *bonds* that could keep together for Naomi a home in Moab were burst. Matthew Henry says, "The land of Moab was now become a melancholy place to her. It is with little pleasure that she can breathe in that air in which her husband and sons had expired; or go on that ground in which they lay buried out of her sight, but not out of her thoughts." 2. Her heart had got sick for the home of her youth, that home which was now to her imagination and recollection "home, sweet home." "Heaven," she remembered, "lay around her" in her childhood. And such feelings as then thrilled within her are the stuff out of which, as years roll on, patriotism is woven. 3. She was reduced to absolute poverty. Diseases and death are costly, especially in a strange land, among strangers. And pitiable is the condition of those who, in a strange land and among strangers, are unable to "pay their way." 4. She would shrink, moreover, from the possibility of being burdensome to her daughters-in-law, who might, in consequence of their own widowhood, have difficulty in lending efficient assistance. However much she was pulled down in her circumstances, in her spirit her fine womanly independence stood erect. 5. She had learned that brighter days had dawned on the land of her early love. "The Lord had visited his people to give them bread." And "bread," as Dr. Thomas Fuller remarks, "is a dish in every course. Without it can be no feast; with it can be no famine." The Lord gave it. "The miracle of the loaves was a sudden putting forth of God's bountiful hand from behind the veil of his ordinary providence; the miracle of the harvest is the working of the same bountiful hand, only unseen, giving power to the living grains to drink the dew and imbibe the sunshine, and appropriate the nourishment of the soil during the long bright days of summer. I understand the one miracle in the light of the other" (Macmillan's Bible Teachings in Nature, p. 92).

II. SCENE AT NAOMI'S DEPARTURE. 1. Her daughters-in-law, who had "dealt kindly" with their husbands, had likewise dealt kindly with her. What was to become

of them? 2. They convoyed Naomi for some distance, and then, as they all halted, she reminded them that every step in advance took them further from their mothers' homes, and she insisted on their returning. Not for her own sake, however, but for theirs. In their own land their prospects would be brighter than in Judæa. Their mothers were still living, and would no doubt be motherly. Their other relatives would be at hand. They themselves might each be the means of brightening some solitary home. She prayed that they might have "rest." This word, so sweet to the weary and the distracted, reveals one element that is essential to the comfort of a home, whether that home be a cottage or a castle. 3. Naomi's words overwhelm the hearts of her daughters-in-law. They passionately express their desire to accompany her to her old home. But she persists firmly, though tenderly and meltingly, in her dissuaves. It is a scene of weeping—a valley of Baca. At length Orpah yields, and tears herself away. But Ruth would not yield. She "clave to her mother-in-law." The character of both the young widows is beautiful, but that of Ruth is heroic. This world is a constantly chequered scene of arrivals and departures. Looming in the near or more remote future, there is one departure which must be made "in solemn loneliness." Whither? With what convoy?

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 8.—*Kindness.* Tidings reached Naomi that peace and plenty had returned to Judah, and she resolved to return to Bethlehem. She acknowledged the Lord's goodness, who "had visited his people in giving them bread." Doubtless she sought the Lord's guidance with reference to her return. It must have needed courage on her part to form and carry out this resolution. Her affectionate daughters-in-law accompanied her part of the way. Then came the hour of separation. As Naomi bade the young widows return, she uttered words of testimony to their kindness, words of prayer that Heaven might deal kindly with them. Coming from her lips, this witness was precious. They had dealt kindly with the dead—their husbands, her sons. They had dealt kindly with her, in her bereavements and loneliness; they had sympathised with her, and now were willing to accompany her to the land of her birth and early days.

I. The FOUNDATION of kindness. We must seek this below what is called "good nature;" and, taught by Christianity, must find it in the brotherhood of man, the fatherhood of God. The sacrifice of Christ is the power and the model of true Christian kindness.

II. The SPHERE of kindness. The family, as in the passage before us, comes first. "Kind" is related, as a word, to "kin." "Charity begins at home." But, as has been remarked, it does not end there. Kindness should be shown to our fellow-creatures, as Christians, as neighbours, as fellow-countrymen, as members of the human race.

III. The DIFFICULTIES in the way of kindness. It is not always easy for persons of one nation to agree with those of another; foreigners are often foes. It is not always easy for mothers-in-law to agree with daughters-in-law. Yet these difficulties may be overcome, as in this narrative.

IV. The RECOMPENSE of kindness. Naomi's prayer was answered, and the Lord dealt kindly with those who had shown kindness. True kindness will breathe many a prayer. And the Lord's loving-kindness, condescending, unmerited, and free, is his people's most precious possession; it is "better than life!"—T.

Vers. 10—14.—*Separation.* These three women were bound together by the memory of common happiness, by the memory of common sorrows. The proposal that they should part, however reasonable and just, could not but reopen the flood-gates of their grief. Orpah found her consolation in her home in Moab, and Ruth found hers in Naomi's life-long society and affection. But as the three stand before us on the borders of the land, as Naomi begs her daughters-in-law to return, the sorrow and the sanctity of human separations are suggested to our minds.

I. SEPARATIONS BETWEEN LOVING FRIENDS ARE OFTEN EXPEDIENT AND NECESSARY.

II. SEPARATIONS ARE SOMETIMES THE OCCASION OF ALMOST THE BITTEREST SORROWS OF HUMAN LIFE.

III. SEPARATIONS MAY, BY GOD'S GRACE, BE MADE A DISCIPLINE OF THE SOUL'S HEALTH AND WELFARE.

IV. SEPARATIONS MAY BE OVERRULED, BY GOD'S PROVIDENCE, FOR THE REAL GOOD, PROSPERITY, AND HAPPINESS OF THOSE WHO ARE PUT APART.

V. SEPARATIONS REMIND US OF HIM WHO HAS SAID, "I WILL NEVER LEAVE THEE; I WILL NEVER FORSAKE THEE!"—T.

Vers. 6, 7.—*Home returning.* "Then she arose with her daughters-in-law, that she might return. . . . And they went on their way to return." Home again! The first step is everything! "She arose." It was all well with the prodigal when he *did* that. Not simply when he said, I will arise; but when he arose and went to his father. Directly the eye and the heart and the step agree, then the whole is settled. We read nothing of the preliminaries of departure. Who does not know the power of the loadstone when it first begins to act? When the breeze swells the sail from the foreign port, the sailor sees *not* the intervening waters, but the home cottage under the familiar cliffs. There are many beautiful home-returnings in the Bible, but the best of all is the son seeking the father's house.

I. HEARTS ARE UNITED BY COMMON EXPERIENCES. These daughters-in-law were not of her land, nor of her religion; they were not Hebrews; but they were widows! A common sorrow is a welding power, uniting hearts more closely than before. It is said that a babe in a house is a new clasp of affection between husband and wife. True; but an empty cradle has done more than a living child. During the time of these ten years these two wives remained still heathen. We do not know what family they sprang from, or if they were sisters. We do know that Naomi exercised no control or domination over their religious principles. She respects their personal liberty and responsibility; she even urges Ruth not to let natural affection for her override her religious convictions, but to go back to "her gods," as Orpah did. "Behold, thy sister-in-law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods: return thou after thy sister-in-law." What a sorrow it must have been to her that her sons had married heathen women. We can respect that sorrow. And we can see that Naomi did not *slight* her own religion when she said these words, but used them as a test of the sincerity of Ruth. A common sorrow had brought them all very close together. "For," as Bailey says in Festus, "the world is one, and hath one great heart."

II. RETURN JOURNEYS HAVE A TOUCHING ELOQUENCE IN THEIR SCENES. There were the places Naomi had traversed with her husband and her boys; places of rest under the shadow of the rocks, and of refreshment at the wells. Much must there have been, to recall conversations touched with anxiety concerning their future in the land of Moab. So would many places speak to us to-day. There, care gazed at us wistfully, and we remember all the thoughts it suggested. There she heard the tinkling of the bells of the camels, as the little trading cavalcade passed by her. What reminiscences! And they would all remind her of the good hand which had led her on, and never forgotten or forsaken her.

III. RETURN JOURNEYS REMIND US OF LITTLE EPISODES OF LIFE THAT ARE OVER FOR EVER. We cannot in the ordinary course of an unbroken and unshifting home realise the flight of time so well as when we have marked changes, which by their very abruptness divide life into chapters, which, like volumes, have their commencement and close. A new nest has to be built, and new trees have to be sought to build it in. Thus with ordinary observation we may notice how those who have had to seek new homes find the pilgrim-nature of life more marked in their thought than those who are born and brought up and settled through the long years in one home. There is a dreamy sense of continuance unbroken in some lives! "That she might return!" But she would not, could not take all of herself with her. She would leave, as we all do, a memory of character, an influence of good or evil over those who had been associated with her in the foreign land.—W. M. S.

Ver. 8.—*Benedictions.* The Hebrews were fond of benedictions. "The Lord bless thee and keep thee." "And Jacob blessed Joseph, and said, The God which fed me all

my life long unto this day, the angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads." "The Lord bless thee out of Zion." These Scriptures of olden time touch us so tenderly, because they recognise the living hand, the loving heart of God. It is this which will make them never grow old. It is this which makes their inspiration living, and keeps their fountains of consolation open still. We are always meeting and parting, journeying forth and returning home. Our families are broken up, our churches have gates of entrance and departure, and the picture of life is always one of a tent-life. We are pilgrims and strangers, as all our fathers were. The keynote of all that I have to say to you from this text is in that word "kindly." The argument is this. We can understand kindness in the sphere of the human, and rise from that to a prayer for the Divine kindness. No society in any age can be cemented together by force alone. Feudalism, for instance, in olden times, was not all terror. The baron could command his dependents in time of war, as he fed and housed and clothed them in times of peace; but, as the old chroniclers tell us, there was often a rare hospitality, a hearty cheerfulness, a chivalrous affection in the somewhat stern relationship; nor will any political economy of government ever be able to preserve nations in allegiance to each other, or at peace amongst themselves, without the cultivation of Christian brotherhood.

I. THE LORD KNOWS BEST WHAT KINDNESS IS. The Lord deal kindly with you. Has he been kind? that is the question for us all. At times we should have been tempted to answer, No! The vine is blighted, the fig tree withered, the locusts have spoiled the green of spring, the little lambs have died. Kindly? Yes, we shall answer one time when we stand in our lot at the end of days. For kindness is not indulgence. I am thankful that this once common word has dropped out of our prayers—Indulgent Father. No word in the English language describes a feebleness of being than the word indulgence; it refers always to the weaker side of our nature; that which is pleasant to us, that which eases us of pain and of discipline and effort. Prayer like this goes to the heart; more especially from the Naomis of the universe who have had so hard a time of it, to whom life has been so full of bereavement and battle. But if you study life, you will see it is the indulged who complain; it is those nursed in the lap of luxury who whine and whimper if the sun does not shine, if the pomegranate, and the fig, and the grape do not supplement the bread. Indulgence breeds supercilious mannerism and contempt for common things in them; and all seems so very strange if men, and women, and things are not ready for their comfort. God's kindness to us may take forms which surprise us. At the heart of his severest judgments there is mercy, in the bitter spring there is healing water, in the desolated altar there is the downfall of idolatry. Abba, Father, we cry, and he seems not to hear us. The wild winds seem to waft away into empty space our cries for help and pity, but he who sitteth in the heavens hears and answers according to the wisdom of his own will. The kindest things God has ever done for us have been, perhaps, the strangest and severest. So it was with Daniel, and Jacob, and Joseph, and Abraham our father. All God's ways are done in truth, and truth is always kindness, for the music of the universe is set in that key. The throne of the Almighty himself has its firm pillars planted on that. Away we go to business and duty. Farewell to son and daughter. Go thy way, pilgrim of life, with knapsack and staff; henceforth our paths are separate, and for you there will come battles when we cannot fight beside you, burdens we cannot help you to bear. To another hearth you will come at evening, when the day's work is done, and the anodynes of sympathy are needed for the worker's heart. "Go thy way. The Lord deal kindly with thee."

II. THE LORD ALONE WILL BE WITH US ALL THROUGH OUR FUTURE PILGRIMAGE. Apart from Divine power, which we have not to bless with, there is Divine presence which we all need. Christ will be with us to the end. Never will come a battle, a temptation, a solitude, a sorrow, a needful sacrifice, but the Lord will be at hand. The sceptre will never be laid in front of an empty throne. The Lord reigns. It is touching to see the struggles of modern thought in the minds of men who have drifted away from the incarnation and resurrection of our Lord. "The ocean encroaches more and more each year"—to use a figure of one who has marked the "ebb" of thought—"and he watches his fields eaten up from year to year." Yes,

says the same writer, who is depicting the drift:—"The meadow-land, whereon he played in the innocent delights of childhood, has now become a marshy waste of sand. The garden where he gathered flowers, an offering of love and devotion to his parents, is now sown with sea-salt. The church where he offered up his childish prayers, and wondered at the high mysteries of which his teachers spoke, stands tottering upon the edge of a crumbling cliff that the next storm may bring down in ruin." And this is rightly called "an experience of spiritual misery." Pathetic, indeed, is this. The picture is most touching and saddening! Who can feel it more than those who suffer the eclipse of faith? We, who worship here, trust in the living God, who as we believe revealed himself to our fathers by the prophets, and who in these last days has spoken to us by his Son, whom he hath made heir of all things, anath given us this testimony, in that he hath raised him from the dead.—W. M. S.

Ver. 8.—"As you have dealt with the dead and me." This beautiful analogy, which has its root idea in love and home, is very suggestive.

I. THE LORD KNOWS BEST WHAT OTHERS HAVE BEEN TO US. "As you have dealt with the dead and me." You have been good and true to them, Naomi says, with a voice that trembles with remembrances of the old days gone for ever. It is a touching little sentence. The dead. So silent now. Never to come back for us to touch imperfectness into riper good; never to charm away with pleasant thoughts the dull hours; never to fill with deeper meanings of love the half-empty words; never to make more Divine the common service of life; never to put the best interpretation upon conduct; never to lift the leaden crown of care from the anxious brow; never to help to transfigure the mean and lowly with heavenly hopes and aspirations. Gone! What a world of vacancy, and silence, and subtle mystery! Is it strange we should wish well to those who were kind to the dead? And Naomi links her own being with them still. "The dead and me." And with true hearts they never can be disassociated. Anniversaries of remembrance make our separations no more distant. They soften them. They give place for comforting remembrances; but the dead are near as ever. "The dead and me!" Who shall separate? None. Christ died, yea, rather is risen again, and he will raise us up together to the heavenly places. What a blessing so to live, so to fill our place as sons and daughters, so to sweeten, sublime, and sanctify life that others may make our conduct a plea with that God who has known our heart and life, and say, "The Lord deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and me."

II. THE LORD HAS GIVEN US GUARANTEES OF HIS KINDNESS. We are not left to meditate on rain and fruitful seasons only. Not the green of spring, nor the south wind of summer, nor the gold of autumn alone proclaim his goodness. So long as the story of the cross has Divine meaning for us, so long as we believe it, not alone as the spirit of a good man's life, but as the revelation of God manifest in the flesh, so long can we exclaim, "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us." Nor can we exclude conscience from our argument; that, too, is a guarantee that the Almighty cares for us, that he will not let us sin and suffer without the very voice Divine awakening, alarming, and arresting us. None but a good Being would have put conscience there, and made it universal, and filled it with such sweet benedictions for the soul. We are surrounded by evidences of the Eternal pity. God who spared not his own Son, will with him also freely give us all things—for man is still his child, and he has a desire to the work of his hands. When we pray, therefore, "The Lord deal kindly with thee," we only ask him to be like himself, we only put him in remembrance of his promise to hear when we call upon him. Some would think God kind, indeed, if he were less severe on sin; to them all law is baneful, and the sorest evils are only evidences of an imperfect brain, or an untrained mind, or an ungovernable power of impulse. How, then, should the law of God be other than dislikable—nay, detestable to them; but he who prepared the light, prepared also the throne of his judgment, and he will by no means clear the guilty—for the love of God would be but a weak sentiment if it were not harmonised with a law which means order, truth, righteousness, and justice in all domains of his eternal empire. We only predicate that love is the root of law, as it

RUTH.

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is also the essence of mercy, and how God's kindness even on the cross shows that justice and mercy blend with each other.

III. THE LORD LOOKS FOR OUR LOVE TO HIM IN OUR LOVE TO EACH OTHER. If we love him we shall feed his lambs, forgive our enemies, and fulfil the whole law of love. How many there have been who, professing even an extreme sanctity, have robbed their partners, deluded their followers, and sometimes darkened for ever a brightly opening life. It is saddening to think what religion has suffered from those whose countenances advertise asperity and contempt, selfishness and pride, whilst they carry their Bibles under their arms, and seem shocked at the exuberance of a healthy joy. Deal kindly? Not they. Their silken words are often the soft sheaths of dagger purposes, and their sham friendship is often only the occasion of stealing mental photographs of you to distribute among their friends. Deal kindly? Why they sleep as well when they have wounded as when they have healed, and they do not understand what the plan of salvation has to do with a conscientious rectitude, a tender consideration, and a warm and loving heart. Deal kindly. Let the Church arise and shine, and put on her beautiful garments. Let the venerable Apostle John take his place once more in the midst of the Churches, and say, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, for God is love." "If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us." "My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and truth." "He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him." How true we feel all this to be, and yet how hard in such a world as this. God is light, God is love, but unless we walk in the light with him we know nothing of it at all. It is still more popular to discuss a mystery than to seek after a Divine ideal. It is still true that many appraise their goodness by their greater enlightenment on some disputable points of religion, and they greatly hope their friend and brother will come to *see* like themselves. Alas! alas! all the while we may perchance be so untrue to Christ, we may be experiencing no sensitive grief that we are unlike the chief Shepherd of the sheep, so worldly, so captious, so dull in all Divine sensibilities. Naomi's prayer, therefore, may teach us much to-day about God—our Saviour; much, too, about ourselves. This, at all events, is true. If the harvests of love come late, they are very real and very precious. Years alone can reveal character. We know what *others* are in times of test and trial, as Naomi did in a strange land. She was a mother-in-law, and that is a hard part to fulfil, often the subject of satire, too often, indeed, an experience which awakens slender sympathy; she yet gained the crown of trust, and honour, and love. And now, how can she speak better for others than by speaking to God for them? The God who has never left her, the God who has been the husband of the widow, the God who sent her human solace in the trying hours of her bereavement in the far away land. "The Lord deal kindly with you." When once in the hush of death a girl stood at the threshold of the door, trembling, as childhood does, in the presence of death, the mother, bending over the quiet sleeper, beckoned her in. She regained confidence then, and taking up the cold hand kissed it, and said of her dead brother, "Mother, that hand never struck me." How beautiful! Can we say the same, that we never wounded the dead? Can we say it of the Christ himself, that we never crucified the Son of God afresh? And now we look up to the great Father of our spirits, and the God of our salvation, and pray him to bless all we love, to make them his own now and evermore. His kindness is truer, deeper, wiser than our own. "The Lord bless them and keep them." "The Lord deal kindly with them."—W. M. S.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER I. 15—22.

Ver. 15.—And she said, Behold, thy sister-in-law is gone back to her people, and to her gods: return thou after thy sister-in-law. The expression that stands in King James's version thus, "and to her

gods," is rendered by Dr. Cassel "and to her God." The same interpretation, it is noteworthy, is given in the Targum of Jonathan, who renders the expression, "and to her Fear" (וּלְיִרְאָתָהּ). Such a translation assumes that the Moabites were not only theists, but monotheists. And yet

in the mythology, or primitive theology, of Moab, we read both of Baal-Peor and of Chemosh. As to the former, see Num. xxv. 3, 5; Deut. iv. 8; Ps. cvi. 28; Hosea ix. 10. As to the latter, see Judges xi. 24; 1 Kings xi. 7, 33; Jer. xlviii. 7, 13. In Numbers, moreover, xxi. 29, and in Jeremiah xlviii. 46, the Moabites are called *the people of Chemosh*, and frequently is their national god called Chemosh in the inscription of King Mesha on the *Moabitish Stone*, so recently discovered and deciphered. It is supposed, not without reason, that the two names belonged to one deity, Chemosh being the old native name. Nevertheless, the translation "to her god" is an interpretation, not a literal rendering, and, on the other hand, the translation "to her gods" would, on the hypothesis of the monotheism of the Moabites, be unidiomatic. The original expression, "to her Elohim," does not tell anything, and was not intended by Naomi to tell anything, or to hint anything, of a numerical character concerning the object or objects of the Moabitish worship. *It was an expression equally appropriate whether there was, or was not, a plurality of objects worshipped.* It might be liberally rendered, and to her own forms of religious worship. The word *elohim* was a survival of ancient polytheistic theology and worship, when a plurality of powers were held in awe. "For," says Fuller, "the heathen, supposing that the whole world, with all the creatures therein, was too great a diocese to be daily visited by one and the same deity, they therefore assigned sundry gods to several creatures." The time arrived, however, when the great idea flashed into the Hebrew mind, *The Powers are One!* and hence the plural noun, with its subtended conception of unity, became construed with verbs and adjectives in the singular number. It was so construed when applied to the one living God; but it readily retained its original applicability to a plurality of deities, and hence, in such a passage as the one before us, where there is neither adjective nor verb to indicate the number, the word is quite incapable of exact rendering into English. Orpah had returned to her people and her Elohim. *Return thou after thy sister-in-law.* Are we then to suppose that Naomi desired Ruth to return to her Moabitish faith? Is it with a slight degree of criticism that she referred to Orpah's palinode? Would she desire that Ruth should, in this matter, follow in her sister-in-law's wake? We touch on tender topics. Not unlikely she had all along suspected or seen that Orpah would not have insuperable religious scruples. And not unlikely, too, she would herself be free from narrow religious bigotry, at least to the

extent of dimly admitting that the true worship of the heart could reach the true God, even when offensive names, and forms, and symbolisms were present in the outer courts of the creed. Nevertheless, when she said to Ruth, "Return thou after thy sister-in-law," she no doubt was rather putting her daughter-in-law to a final test, and leading her to thorough self-sifting, than encouraging her to go back to her ancestral forms of worship. "God," says Fuller, "wrestled with Jacob with desire to be conquered; so Naomi no doubt opposed Ruth, hoping and wishing that she herself might be foiled."

Ver. 16.—*And Ruth said, Insist not on me forsaking thee: for whither thou goest, I will go.* Ruth's mind was made up. Her heart would not be wrenched away from her mother-in-law. The length of the journey, its dangers, and the inevitable fatigue accompanying it, moved not, by so much as a jot, her resolution. Had not her mother-in-law the same distance to travel, the same fatigue to endure, the same perils to encounter? Might not the aged traveller, moreover, derive some assistance and cheer from the company of a young, ready-handed, and willing-hearted companion? She was resolved. Nothing on earth would separate them. *Wheresoever thou lodgest, I will lodge.* A better version than Luther's, "Where thou stayest, I will stay" (*wo du bleibest, da bleibe ich auch*). The reference is not to the ultimate destination, but to the nightly halts. פָּלַג is the verb employed; and it is rendered "to tarry all night" in Gen. xxiv. 54; xxviii. 11; xxxi. 54; Judges xix. 6, &c. It is the Latin *pernoctare* and the German *übernachten*, the former being the rendering of the Vulgate, and the latter the translation in the *Berlenburger Bibel*. *Thy people (is) my people, and thy God my God.* There being no verb in the original, it is well to supply the simplest copula. Ruth claims, as it were, Naomi's people and Naomi's God as her own already.

Ver. 17.—*Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried.* She wished to be naturalised for life in Naomi's fatherland. Nor did she wish her remains to be conveyed back for burial to the land of her nativity. *So may Yahveh do to me, and still more, but death only shall part me and thee.* She appeals to the God of the Israelites, the one universal God. She puts herself on oath, and invokes his severest penal displeasure if she should suffer anything less uncontrollable than death to part her from her mother-in-law. "So may Yahveh do to me." It was thus that the Hebrews made their most awful appeals to Yahveh. They signified their willingness to suffer some dire calamity if they should either do the

evil deed repudiated or fail to do the good deed promised. So stands in misty indefiniteness; not, as Fuller supposes, by way of "leaving it to the discretion of God Almighty to choose that arrow out of his quiver which he shall think it most fit to shoot," but as a kind of euphemism, or cloudy veil, two-thirds concealing, and one-third revealing, whatever horrid infliction could by dramatic sign be represented or hinted. *And still more*—a thoroughly Semitic idiom, *and so may he add (to do)!* There was first of all a full imprecation, and then an additional 'bittock,' to lend intensity to the asseveration. "But death only shall sever between me and thee!" Ruth's language is broken. Two formulas of imprecation are flung together. One, if complete, would have been to this effect: "So may Yahveh do to me, and so may he add to do, 'if' (דִּם) aught but death sever between me and thee!" The other, if complete, would have run thus: "I swear by Yahveh 'that' (כִּי) death, death only, shall part thee and me!" In the original the word *death* has the article, *death emphatically*. It is as if she had said *death, the great divider*. The full idea is in substance *death alone*. This divider alone, says Ruth, "shall sever between me and thee;" literally, "between me and between thee," a Hebrew idiom, repeating for emphasis' sake the two-sided relationship, but taking the repetition in reverse order, *between me (and thee) and between thee (and me)*.

Ver. 18.—*And she perceived*. In our idiom we should have introduced the proper name, "And Naomi perceived." *That she was determined to go with her*. She saw that Ruth was fixed in her resolution. *And she left off speaking to her*. She "gave in." Ruth, as Fuller has it, was "a fixed star."

Ver. 19.—*And they two went*—they trudged along, the two of them—until they came to Bethlehem. In the expression "the two of them" the masculine pronoun (הֵם for הֵנָּה) occurs, as in verses 8 and 9. It mirrors in language the actual facts of relationship in life. The masculine is sometimes assumptively representative of both itself and the feminine. And sometimes, even apart from the representative element, it is the overlapping and overbearing gender. *And it came to pass, as they entered Bethlehem, that the whole city got into commotion concerning them, and they said, Is this Naomi?* Naomi, though greatly altered in appearance, besides being travel-worn and weary, was recognised. But who was that pensive and beautiful companion by her side? Where was Elimelech? Where was Machlon and Chilion? Why are they not with their mother? Such would be some of the

questions started, and keenly talked about and discussed. Then on both the wayfarers the finger-marks of poverty, involuntary signals of distress, would be unconcealable. Interest, sympathy, gossip would be alive throughout the little town, especially among the female portion of the population, and loud would be their exclamations of surprise. The verb *they said* is feminine in Hebrew, נִשְׁמְעָה, a nicety which cannot be reproduced in English without obtruding too prominently the sex referred to, as in Michaelis's version—"and all the women said." So the Vulgate. The verb which we have rendered *got into commotion* is found in 1 Sam. iv. 5—"the earth *rang again*," and in 1 Kings i. 45—"the city *rang again*."

Ver. 20.—*And she said to them, Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me*. Salutations were respectfully addressed to her as she walked along in quest of some humble abode. And when thus spoken to by the sympathetic townspeople, she was called, of course, by her old *sweet* name. But as it fell in its own rich music on her ears, its original import flashed vividly upon her mind. Her heart "filled" at the contrast which her circumstances represented, and she said, "Address me not as Naomi, call not to me (נָאֻמִּי) Naomi: address me as Mara,"—that is, *bitter*,—"for the Almighty has caused bitterness to me exceedingly" (see on ver. 2). *The Almighty*, or אֱלֹהִים, an ancient polytheistic name that had at length—like אֱלֹהֵינוּ and אֱלֹהֵיכֶם—been reclaimed in all its fullness for the one living and true God. It had become a thorough proper name, and hence it is used without the article. In the Septuagint it is sometimes rendered, as here, ὁ ἰκανός, *the Sufficient*; in Job, where it frequently occurs, ὁ παντοκράτωρ, *the Omnipotent*. But it is one of those peculiar nouns that never can be fully reproduced in any Aryan language. Naomi's theology, as indicated in the expression, "the Almighty hath caused bitterness to me exceedingly," need not be to its minutest jot endorsed. God was not the only agent with whom she had had to do. Much of the bitterness of her lot may have been attributable to her husband or to herself, and perhaps to forefathers and foremothers. It is not fair to ascribe all the embittering element of things to God. Much rather might the sweetness, which had so often relieved the bitterness, be traced to the hand of him who is "the Lord God, merciful and gracious, abundant in goodness."

Ver. 21.—*I went forth full, and Yahveh has caused me to return in emptiness. Why should you call me Naomi, and Yahveh has*

testified against me, and the Almighty has brought evil upon me! She went forth "full," with husband and sons, not to speak of goods. She was under the necessity of returning in *emptiness*, or with *empty hands*. The Hebrew word *רֵיקָה* does not exactly mean *empty*, as it is rendered in the Septuagint, the Vulgate, and King James's version. It is not an adjective, but an adverb, *emptily*. This lamentable change of circumstances she attributed to the action of Yahveh. He had, she believed, been testifying against her by means of the trials through which she had passed. She was right in a certain conditional acceptance of her language; but only on condition of that condition. And, let us condition her declarations as we may, she was probably in danger of making the same mistake concerning herself and her trials which was made by Job's comforters in reference to the calamities by which he was overwhelmed. In so far as *penal evil* is concerned, it may be traced directly or circuitously to the will and government of God. "Shall there be evil—that is, penal evil—in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?" (Amos iii. 6). But there are many sufferings that are not *penal*. The evil that is penal is only one segment of physical evil; and then there is besides, metaphysical evil, or the evil that consists in the inevitable imperfection of finite being. It is noteworthy that the

participle of the Hiphilic verb *עָשָׂה* employed by Naomi is always translated in King James's version *evil doer*, or *wicked doer*, or *evil*, or *wicked*. Naomi, in using such a term, and applying it to Yahveh, was walking on a theological precipice, where it is not needful that we should accompany her. Instead of the literal expression, 'and' *Yahveh*, we may, with our English wealth of conjunctions freely say, 'when' *Yahveh*. There is a charm in the original simplicity. There is likewise a charm in the more complex structure of the free translation.

Ver. 22.—*So Naomi returned*. The narrator pauses to recapitulate his narrative of the return, and hence the recapitulatory *so* is, in English, very much to be preferred to the merely additive *and* of the original. *And Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law, with her, who returned out of the land of Moab*. The cumulative and apparently redundant expression, "who returned out of the land of Moab," is remarkable at once for its simplicity and for its inexactitude. Ruth, strictly speaking, had not returned, but she took part in Naomi's return. *And they arrived in Bethlehem at the commencement of barley-harvest*. Barley ripened before wheat, and began to be reaped sometimes as early as March, but generally in April, or Abib. By the time that the barley-harvest was finished the wheat crop would be ready for the sickle.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 15—22.—*Devoted attachment*. I. Ruth was fixed in her desire and determination to CAST IN HER LOT WITH HER DESOLATE AND DESTITUTE MOTHER-IN-LAW. The absolute unselfishness of this determination is noteworthy, for—1. Be it noted that Naomi was not one of those who are always murmuring and complaining because they do not receive sufficient consideration. 2. Still less did she claim as a right, or urge as a duty, that her daughter-in-law should become her companion in travel, and wait upon her as an attendant. 3. On the contrary, she was careful to put Ruth in an attitude of entire freedom, so that, if she had a secret wish to go back to her Moabitish friends, she could have gratified her desire without laying herself open to the imputation of coldness or ingratitude. 4. Ruth was tested nevertheless, as all of us in our respective relations have either already been or will be. Eve, for instance, was emphatically tested. So was Adam. Abraham too. Joseph also. Very particularly the second Adam, our Lord Jesus Christ, when he was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness. Judas was tested when the demon of cupidity entered into his heart. So was Peter when he stood warming himself at the fire in the court of the high priest's palace. All who are *tried* are tested. And all men without exception have to endure *trial* and *trials*. It was as regards the strength of her attachment to her mother-in-law that Ruth was tested. Not only did Naomi hold out no hopes of home-comfort in Judah, she expressly said, dissuasively, when Orpah had gone back, "Behold, thy sister-in-law has gone back to her people, and to her Elohim: return thou after thy sister-in-law" (ver. 15). 5. Ruth stood the test. Not so did Eve. Not so Adam. But Abraham stood it. So Joseph. Emphatically did Jesus stand it, so that he knows how to succour those who are tempted. Judas did not stand the test. Nor at first did Peter, though afterwards he repented, and, when reconverted, was able to strengthen his brethren. Ruth, for love to Naomi, was

able to say in her heart, "Farewell, Melchom! Farewell, Chemosh! Farewell, Moab! Welcome, Israel! Welcome, Canaan! Welcome, Bethlehem!" (Fuller). 6. She witnessed a good and most noble confession of love and devotedness (see vers. 16, 17). She said, "Insist not on me forsaking thee; for whither thou goest, I will go; wheresoever thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people is my people, and thy God my God: where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried. So may Yahveh do to me, and still more, if aught but death part thee and me." "Nothing," says Matthew Henry, "could be said more fine, more brave." "Truly," says Dr. Kitto, "the simple eloquence of the mouth that speaks out of the abundance of the heart never found more beautiful and touching expression than in these words of this young widow" ("Daily Bible-Illustrations"). "Her vow," says S. Cox, "has stamped itself on the very heart of the world; and that not because of the beauty of its form simply, though even in our English version it sounds like a sweet and noble music, but because it expresses in a worthy form, and once for all, the utter devotion of a genuine and self-conquering love. It is the spirit which informs and breathes through these melodious words that make them so precious to us, and that also renders it impossible to utter any fitting comment on them" ("Book of Ruth," pp. 72, 73). Be it borne in mind that something of the same enthusiasm of love, that dwelt in the heart of Ruth, should be found in *the centre of every home*. Wheresoever a heart is swayed and dominated by the might and mastery of a great affection, the entire character becomes clothed with mingled dignity and beauty.

II. THE ENTRY OF THE TWO WIDOWS INTO BETHLEHEM. There was no more talk, no more thought, of turning back. The hearts of the two widows were locked together for ever. Hence they travelled on from stage to stage, until, worn and wearied, they entered Bethlehem. 1. Note the effect on the citizens, especially the female portion of them (see ver. 19). Naomi, passing along through the streets, was recognised. The news flew from individual to individual, from house to house, from lane to lane. There was a running to and fro of excited mothers and maidens. All were eager to see the returned emigrant, and her pensive Moabitish companion. Her old acquaintances, in particular, when they had seen and identified her, broke up into groups, and talked, and said, Is that Naomi? That, Naomi! Is this Naomi? This, Naomi! "So unlike is the rose when it is withered to what it was when it was blooming." 2. Note the effect on Naomi herself. As she looked on old scenes, and witnessed the excitement and commotion of old neighbours and acquaintances, her heart felt overwhelmed within her, and she said to the sympathising friends who clustered around her, "Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me" (see vers. 20, 21). But it surely will be permitted to us not only to mingle our tears with those of the afflicted widow, but likewise to pause reverently ere we unreservedly accept or endorse her attribution of all her trials and woes to the hand and heart of the Lord. It should nevertheless be borne in mind that even those trials that come most directly from men's own acts or choices come to pass by the permission of the Almighty, and are so overruled by him that they will be made to work for good to them who love him (Rom. viii. 28).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 16—18.—*Constancy*. For simple pathos and unstudied eloquence, this language is unsurpassed. "One touch of nature makes the whole world kin." Here is the fervent outpouring of a true heart. Love and resolution are at their height. Thousands of human souls have expressed their mutual attachment in these words. They are not words of extravagance or of passion, but of feeling, of principle, of a fixed and changeless mind. Constancy must be admired, even by the inconstant.

I. THERE WERE INFLUENCES OPPOSED TO RUTH'S CONSTANCY. 1. Early associations and friendships would have tied her to Moab. 2. The entreaty of Naomi that she would return set her perfectly free to do so, if she had been disposed. 3. The example of her sister-in-law, Orpah, could not but have some weight. Orpah had been, like Ruth, kind alike to the living and the dead, yet she wept, kissed her mother-in-law, and returned. 4. The religion of her childhood could scarcely have been

without attractions for her. Could she leave the temples, the deities, the observances of her earliest days behind?

II. THERE WERE MANIFESTATIONS OF PIOUS CONSTANCY IN RUTH'S RESOLVES. 1. She would go with Naomi, though by an unknown route. 2. She would dwell with Naomi, though in an unknown home. 3. She would die with Naomi, though to be buried in an unknown grave.

III. THERE WAS A RELIGIOUS FOUNDATION FOR RUTH'S CONSTANCY. 1. Apparent from the resolution—"Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God." 2. Apparent from the adjuration she employed—"The Lord do so," &c.

IV. THE TRIUMPH AND RECOMPENSE OF RUTH'S CONSTANCY. 1. Her fidelity and devotion were reciprocated by Naomi. 2. In the providence of God Ruth was rewarded by an honourable position and a happy life.—T.

Vers. 19—21.—*Heart wounds reopened.* Return after long absence to scenes of youth always affecting; he who returns is changed; they who receive him are changed too. Observe the reception which Naomi met from her former neighbours at Bethlehem. Their question, "Is this Naomi?" evinces—1. Surprise. She is living! We see her again! Yet how is she changed! 2. Interest. How varied has been her experience whilst absent! And she loves Bethlehem so that she returns to it in her sorrow! 3. Compassion. "All the city was moved about them." How could those who remembered her fail to be affected by the calamities she had passed through? Consider the sentiments expressed by Naomi upon her return.

I. HER GRIEF WAS NATURAL AND BLAMELESS. "I went out full," *i. e.* in health, in youth, with some earthly property; above all, with husband and sons. "The Lord hath brought me home again empty," *i. e.* aged, broken down in health and spirits, poor, without kindred or supporters. "Call me not Naomi," *i. e.* pleasant; "call me Mara," *i. e.* bitter. Her lot was sad. Religion does not question the fact of human trouble and sorrow. And she was not wrong in feeling, in the circumstances, the peculiar pressure of grief and distress. We remember that "Jesus wept."

II. HER RECOGNITION OF GOD'S PROVIDENCE WAS RIGHT; WAS A SIGN OF PIETY. She attributes all to the Almighty, to the Lord. Observe that in two verses this acknowledgment is made four times. In a world over which God rules we should acknowledge his presence and reign in all human experience. If trouble comes to us by means of natural laws, those laws are ordered by his wisdom. If by human agency, that agency is the result of the constitution with which he has endowed man. If as the result of our own action, he connects actions with their consequences. Therefore, let us reverently recognise his hand in all that happens to us!

III. HER INTERPRETATION OF GOD'S PROVIDENCE WAS MISTAKEN. "The Lord," said Naomi, "hath testified against me." Men frequently imagine that if God could prevent afflictions, and yet permits them, he cannot regard the afflicted in a favourable and friendly light. But this is not so. "Whom he loveth he chasteneth." The Book of Job warns us against misunderstanding the meaning of calamity. Christ has also warned us against supposing that Divine anger is the explanation of human griefs and sufferings. "All things work together for good unto those who love God." How often is it true, as the poet Cowper knew and sang—

"Behind a frowning providence
God hides a smiling face!"

T.

Vers. 16, 17.—"Entreat me not to leave thee." A mother and a daughter-in-law are to go together. The daughter wishes it, and petitions with most eloquent ardour that it shall be so. A mother-in-law is sometimes—alas, too often—the subject of criticism and satire. It is a difficult position to fill, and many bitterly unkind and untrue caricatures have been made upon the relationship. In this case Naomi had made herself beloved by both Orpah and Ruth, and it was only through Naomi's words, "Turn again," that Orpah went back; for they had both said, "Surely we will return with thee unto thy people." Ruth, however, remained firm, and her fidelity has made these words quickening to many undecided souls.

I. ENTREATY MAY PROVE TOO EARNEST. "Entreat me not." It is the language of

a heart that feels what limits there are to the power of resistance within us. Test may turn in unwise hands into overpowering temptation. Naomi knew where to stop, and Ruth remains to us a picture of heroic devotion. Orpah failed in courage, but was not destitute of affection, for her farewell is accompanied with a kiss of love. In her character we see impulse without strength. But "Ruth clave unto her." And it was no light sacrifice to leave fatherland and home. We can hardly call the test at first a religious one, for it is evident that Ruth's love for her mother-in-law was the immediate occasion of her cleaving to her, and leaving the Moabitish gods. In time, doubtless, her nominal faith turned into a living heritage.

II. LOVE CREATES THE FINEST ELOQUENCE. There is no utterance in the Old Testament more pathetic and melodious than these words. They are idyllic in their eloquence. There is nothing stilted or artificial in them, and they have in them a rhythm of melody which is more beautiful than a mere rhyme of words. Courage and sacrifice, love and devotion, breathe all through them. They condense too all that is prophetic of coming experience—the lodging and the loneliness, the weary pilgrimage and the grave in a foreign land. The mind cannot frame sentences like these without the glow of a sincere and sacrificial heart. We feel as we read them what grandeur there is in human nature when love evokes all its depth of power. It is not a skilful touch that can do this, but a soul alive to the calls of love and duty.

III. NO TRUE LIFE WAS EVER LIVED IN VAIN. It was what Naomi had been to her, what she was in herself, that made this sacrifice possible. Love creates love. The charm of friendship may be merely intellectual, and then, after the feast of reason, all is over. But Naomi's character was rooted in religion. She did not carry the mere roll of the prophets in her hand; she carried the spirit of the Holy Book in her heart. Ruth had never been in synagogue or temple; she had listened to no Rabbi, and never sat at the feet of the doctors; but as "the earliest piety is mother's love," so the character of a true mother is a stem around which the tendrils of the young heart climb to the mother's God. None of us liveth to himself. And so from the flower of piety, the seed drops into other hearts, and brings forth fruit after many days.—W. M. S.

Ver. 18.—*Moral steadfastness.* "When she saw that she was steadfastly minded." "Then she left speaking." The test had done a true work, and we see the heroine who could stand fast. Yes; "having done all, to stand," is something in the great emergencies and temptations of life. There are times when to stand in the rush of the stream, as the river breaks into spray around us, is as much for the hour as we can do, and God knows and honours that.

I. THE STEADFAST MIND GIVES THE STEADFAST STEP. A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways. Veering here and there like the wind, there is no dependence on the direction he may take. The man or the woman is made by something within them invisible to the world. When Christ was led as a lamb to the slaughter, the great conflict had been fought out in Gethsemane, and then the steps were calm and steadfast. What an hour is that in which, in common parlance, "the mind is made up," the resolution taken. This is firmness, as opposed to obstinacy, which acts without reasons, and often in the teeth of them. The misery caused in this world by obstinate people is to be seen sometimes in the home, where sulkiness of temper makes the lives of others miserable. Firmness is the result of the thoughtful decision of an enlightened mind and a consecrated heart.

II. THE STEADFAST MIND MAKES THE BEST COMPANION. Ruth was ready for the companion journey back to Bethlehem. And in all our life journeys nothing is so precious as a steadfast heart. There are times of misinterpretation in all lives—times of disheartenment, times of shadow and darkness. In such hours a steadfast companion is God's richest gift to us. What consolation it is to know that even humanly every support will not give way, that there will always be one eye to brighten, one hand to help, one heart to love, one mind to appreciate. The fickle and irresolute may have a transient beauty and a winning manner, but these are poor endowments without a steadfast mind.

III. THE STEADFAST MIND IS FREED FROM THE INFINITUDE OF LESSER WORRIES.

It is made up. It is not open to every solicitation. It is negative to doubt and distrust. This is the *right* way, and nought can move it. The feeble and irresolute have a restless life. They are constantly balancing expediences and advantages. Christ our Divine Lord set his face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem. The hardest journey of all to the shame and spitting, the awful darkness and the cruel cross. If we are firm and decided in our purposes we shall not be wasting either time or strength upon the solicitations of the popular or profitable. A voice within will say, "This is the way, walk ye in it."—W. M. S.

Ver. 19.—"So they two went till they came to Bethlehem." "They two!" Sometimes it is husband and wife. Sometimes it is two sisters commencing life together in the great city where they have to earn their bread. Sometimes it is two lovers who have large affection and little means, and who have to wait and work and hope on. Sometimes it is widow and child. "They two!" What unrecorded histories of heroism there are written in God's book all unknown to us.

I. HERE IS THE COMMENCEMENT AND CLOSE OF A PILGRIMAGE. They went. They came. So is it of the life history itself. All is enfolded in these brief words. What a multitude of figures in Scripture suggest the brevity of life. A tale that is told. A post. A weaver's shuttle. The morning flower. So indeed it is. What a multitude of incidents would be included even in this brief journey of Naomi's; but these are the two clasps of the volume of life. They went. They came. "Every beginning holds in it the end, as the acorn does the oak."

II. HERE IS THE SIGHT OF A CITY. Bethlehem. Cities with them were not like cities with us. Even Bethlehem was called a city. But the old dwelling-places, after ten years, have a mute eloquence about them. Other feet come to the well. Little children who gathered flowers on the wild hills are now bearing pitchers to the well. But after a weary journey how refreshing to the Easterns was the glimpse of the white houses on the hills. We look for a city. A city which hath foundations. A city where our beloved are; for God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. We do not think of it in health and strength and excitement of human interest, but one day we shall look with quiet longing for the city gates. The evening of life will come upon us, and we shall pray, "Let me go, for the day breaketh."

III. HERE IS A PILGRIMAGE ENDED. Better is the end of a thing than the beginning, said the wise man. And so it is. "I have finished my course." How much is included in that. When the battered ship comes into harbour we take more interest in her than the spick and span new vessel with trim decks, and untorn sails, and scarless masts. When the battle is over we think more of the shot-pierced flag than of the new banner borne out by the troops with martial music. We like to see the pilgrim start. But some pilgrims turn back. We like to *hear* Ruth's resolve. How much better is it to *see* the resolve written in letters of living history. We can call no man hero, no woman heroine, till the march is over and the victory won.—W. M. S.

Ver. 19.—Never seemed there a sadder contrast. Naomi left Bethlehem in the full bloom of womanhood, with a husband and two sons. Elimelech, her husband, died, we read, "and she was left and her two sons." They took them wives, and, as mothers do, she lived in the hopes and honours of their new homes; but, after dwelling in Moab about ten years, we read Mahlon and Chilion died also, both of them, and the woman was left of her two sons and her husband. A strange land is not so strange when we carry home with us; but it is strange when all that made home *home*, is gone. We need not wonder, therefore, that not alone for the bread of harvest, but for the bread of love, she and her daughters-in-law "went on the way, to *return* to the land of Judah." But, with a fine instinct, Naomi felt that what would be home again for her would be an alien land to them; and the tender narrative tells us how she suggested they should remain, and find rest, each of them, in the place of their people. We well know the sequel to the words of Naomi, "Turn again my daughters;" for Ruth has become with us all a beautiful picture of true-hearted womanhood, and a very household name. But it is with the question, "Is this Naomi?" that we now have to deal. She went out full. Not wealthy, perhaps, —though love is always wealthy, for it alone gives that which worlds want wealth

to buy. She is coming home "empty," as many have done since Naomi did, in all the generations. Bent, and sad, and grey, her worn dress tells of her poverty, her garb bespeaks the widow. All in a few years; all crowded into these few opening verses. The pathway of the past is an avenue now, along which she looks to the opening days, when the light flooded her steps, and she walked in the warm glow of companionship and love. Is this Naomi? And have not we had this to say again and again concerning those whose early days we knew? There we heard the merry shout of children, and there we saw manhood in its strength and prime. Naomi it cannot be: *that* the face we knew as a bride and as a mother! Never! Yet so it is. They went out full and came home empty. Yet not empty, if, like Naomi, they keep their fellowship with God.

I. NAOMI IS A RETURNING PILGRIM. Home has been but a tent life, and the curtains have been rent by sorrow and death. She tells us the old, old story. *Here* have we no continuing city. Beautiful was the land to which she returned, and in that dear land of promise there never was a fairer time than barley-harvest. Many and many a harvest-time had come and gone since Naomi went forth, and many a reaper's song was silent evermore. As she passed the vines and the oleanders fringing the broad fields, bronzed and bright-eyed faces were directed towards her; and here, in the distance, was Bethlehem, its little white houses dotting the green slopes, its well by the wayside. Bethlehem—home! Oh! that strange longing to live through the closing years in the country places where we were born! It is a common instinct. The Chinese have it, and will be buried nowhere else. It is a beautiful instinct too—to look with the reverent eyes of age on the tombstones we used to spell out in the village, to hear the old rush of the river, the old murmur of the sea. Strange thoughts fill this woman's mind, as the old picture is there with a new peopling of forms and faces. Yet not *all* new. The workers turn to the passing figure, and a gleam of recognition, doubtful at first, lights up their eyes. And then the word passes from one to the other, Is this Naomi? It is the same world in which we live to-day. There is also something to remind us that we are pilgrims and strangers, that unresting time will not wait one hour for us. The unseen angels hurry us on through love and grief and death. Happy for us if we say *plainly* that we seek a country, for the only escape from the *ennui* of life is the satisfaction of the immortal thirst within us by the gospel revelation of eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

II. NAOMI IS A GODLY PILGRIM. Travel-worn and weary, with sandaled feet, she is coming to a city sanctified by the faith of her fathers. She had lived in a heathen country so devoutly, that Ruth could say, "Thy God shall be my God"—a beautiful testimony to Naomi's fidelity, to her victory over idolatrous usages, to her own personal influence over others. Thy God! How serious the eye, how sober the mien, of this woman as she comes into the city. She has had a battle of life to fight, and she has fought it well. How brave and noble and faithful a woman she is! Is this Naomi? If there is not so much of what the world calls beauty in her face, there is character there, experience there. The young Christian starting on his pilgrimage is cheerful enough. His armour is bright and new, his enthusiasm is fresh and keen. He goes forth full of enterprise and hope. Do not be surprised if in the after years you ask, Is this Naomi? How careful, how anxious, how dependent on God alone! What bright visions once filled his soul, how ready he was to criticise Christian character, how determined and unflinching he looked! Well, it *was* a noble promise, and where would the world be without the enthusiasm of youth? Be not surprised now if he looks worn and weary. He has had battles to fight that the world knows not of. He has made strange discoveries in the continent of his own heart; he has been well-nigh overcome, and casting himself entirely on his Lord, he says, "By the grace of God I am what I am." Look at that weary heart. Is that Luther? Look at that faithless spirit. Is that Peter? Look at that worr-soldier. Is that Paul? But the Lord is with them! Empty, indeed, in a human sense was Naomi. Call me not Naomi, she said; it has lost its meaning. Life is no longer pleasant. Call me Mara, for life is bitter. True-hearted soul! She knew that it was bitter, indeed, though it was God's will; "for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me." Very bitterly! And are we to cover over that? Can we sing—

"Thy will is sweetest to me when
It triumphs at my cost" !

We may *sing* it ; but it is hard to *live* it. It is glorious to believe in God at such times at all, and to bow with the pain all through our hearts, and to say, "*My God.*"—W. M. S.

Ver. 22 ; ii. 1—3.—Naomi's history may now be carried on in the light of these texts.

I. NAOMI IS AN ANCESTRAL PILGRIM. Ancestor of whom ? Turn to Matt. i. 5, and you will find in the genealogy of our Lord the name of Ruth. The earlier part of that Divine life, how fresh and beautiful it is—the advent, the angels, the shepherds' songs ! The mother, the first visit to the temple, the doctors ! And beautiful ministry too. Power wedded to mercy, miracles of healing, mighty deeds of love, sermons amid the mountains and the cities. True ! But stand here a moment. It is an *early* evening of life, I admit ; but it *is* evening. Do you see in the blue distance One coming from the judgment hall ? Do you hear the wild cry of the mob, "Away with him ! Away with him ! Crucify him ! Crucify him !" ? Do you mark the crush of the crowd round one fallen form, who fainted beneath the burden of that cross which he bore for us all ? Follow him on to the slopes, while Simon, the Cyrenian, helps to bear his cross. The soldiers mock him. The crowd insult him. They spat upon him, they smote him with their hands, they buffeted him. And now his hands and feet are nailed ; his pale face is bowed. Come nearer and gaze. Behold the man ! As the reapers asked, "Is this Naomi ?" so we ask, "Is this Jesus ?" Is this he whose sweet face lay in the manger ? Is this he whose bright inquisitive face was in the temple ? Is this he who passed the angels at heaven's high gate, and *came* to earth, saying, "Lo ! I come to do thy will, O God." Yes ! Bowed, bruised, broken for us. The same Saviour, who now endures the cross, despising the shame. Well may we wonder and adore ! He saved others, himself he cannot—will not—*save* ! More beautiful now than in the stainless infancy of the Holy Child. More beautiful now than when by the shores of Galilee's lake, he spake words which mirrored heaven more purely and clearly than those waters the gold and crimson of the sky. It is the bowed, broken, forsaken, suffering, dying Lord that moves the world's heart. He knew it all. In that hour, when his soul was made an offering for sin, he, being lifted up ; had power to draw all hearts unto him. Is this Naomi ? Well might angels ask, Is this the eternal Son of the Father ? Is this he of whom the Almighty said, "He is my fellow." Is this he to whom command was given, Let all the angels of God worship him ? Yes ! It is he. It is finished. "Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall come in."

II. NAOMI IS A PROVIDED-FOR PILGRIM. Back to Bethlehem ; but how to live ? how to find the roof-tree that should shelter again ? She knew the Eternal's name, "Jehovah-Jireh," the Lord will provide. A kinsman of her husband's, a mighty man of wealth, lived there : of the family of Elimelech ; his name was Boaz. We must not mind criticism when we talk of chance, or happening. The Bible does. It is simply one way of stating what seems to us accidental ; although in reality we know that the least secrets are in the good hand of him "to whom is nothing trivial." Ruth wants to glean ! And Naomi says, Go, my daughter ; "and her *hap*—her chance—was to light on the part of a field belonging unto Boaz." We know that the same old love story, which is new in every generation begins again ; so Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife. So that a new home begins, and a smile plays through the tears of the lonely widow. Naomi has some human light again in her landscape ; she will see the children's children, and take them by the hand into the coming barley-harvests ; she will have some appropriate hopes and joys and interests still. Life to her will not be desolate, because she has still a God above her and a world around her to call forth interest and hope. Her sorrow was not greater than she could bear, and the summer over, even autumn had its tender beauties before life's winter came. So it ever is. Trust in the Lord, and you shall never want any good thing. Believe still in your Saviour, and provided for you will be with

all weapons of fence, all means of consolation, all prosperity that shall not harm your soul. So *true*, then, is the Bible to the real facts of human life. It is not a book of gaiety, for life is real and earnest, and its associations are mortal and mutable. It consecrates home joy, and yet reminds us that every garden has its grave, every dear union its separation. But, on the other hand, there are no utterances of unbearable grief, or unmitigated woe. It says ever to us, Jehovah-Jireh, the Lord will provide. And the facts of experience in every age endorse its truth. As the snows hide flowers even in the Alps, so beneath all our separations and sorrows there are still plants of the Lord, peace, and hope, and joy, and rest in him. Blessed, indeed, shall we be if we can rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him. We, too, shall all change. Time and sorrow will write their experiences on our brow. There will be hours in which we feel like Naomi, empty, oh! so empty. The cup of affection poured out on the ground, the forest without its songsters, the garden without its flowers, the home without its familiar faces. We shall see these pictures every day, and wonder, more and more, how any hearts can do without a Brother and a Saviour in Jesus Christ. But if character be enriched and trained, all is well; for this very end have we had Divine discipline, and the Lord will perfect that which concerneth us for the highest ends of eternal life in him. The baptism with which our Lord was baptised changed his face, altered his mien, enlarged even his Divine experience. He was made "perfect through suffering," and became the Author of eternal salvation to all who trust in him. Coming back even to Bethlehem is only for a season. As Naomi returns, nature alone remains the same; the blue roller-bird would flash for a moment across her path, the music of the turtle-dove remind her of the melody of nature in her childhood;—the peasant garb would tell her of the old unchanged ways; and the line of hills against the sky would remind her that the earth abideth for ever. But for her there was a still more abiding country, where Elimelech, like Abraham, lived, and where Mahlon and Chilion waited for the familiar face that had made their boyhood blessed. And so we wait. The redemption we celebrate here is a passover, a memorial of deliverance and a prophecy of home. Home where sorrow and sighing, night and death, will flee away; where, no longer pilgrims, we shall no more go out, and where the worn face and the weary heart shall be transfigured into the immortal life.—W. M. S.

Ver. 21. "I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty." It seemed, indeed, a *via dolorosa*, this path homeward. How expressive the words.

I. LOVE MAKES LIFE FULL. Why, I thought they went out poor? Yes. Seeking bread? Yes. Yet Naomi's description is true and beautiful. We are "full" when we have that which makes home, home indeed, and we are poor if, having all wealth of means, we have not love. Well, indeed, has it been said that "the golden moments in the stream of life rush past us, and we see nothing but sand; the angels come to visit us, and we only know them when they are gone." We never know how empty life is till the loved are lost to us.

II. THE LORD IS THE DISPOSER OF ALL EVENTS. "The Lord hath brought me home." We talk of Providence when all goes well with us, when the harvests are ripened, and the fruits hang on the wall. But we must not limit Providence to the pleasant. The Lord "takes away" as well as gives. It is said that, in the order of reading at the family altar, when the late John Angell James was about to conduct worship after a severe bereavement, the Psalm to be read was the hundred and third. The good man stopped, tears rolled down his face; and then, gathering up his strength, he said, "Why not? It is the Father!" and he read on, "Bless the Lord, O my soul!"

III. THE FULLEST HOME MAY SOON BE EMPTIED. Yes! We too should feel it so. A husband and two sons gone! What converse there had been! what interest in each other's pursuits! what affectionate concern for each other's weal and happiness! and what a wealth of love for Naomi, the centre of all! We feel at such seasons that death would be blessed relief for us. The thought comes across us, "I have got to live;" to live on from day to day, attending to the minutiae of duty, and coming here and there so often on the little relics of the dead. Home again! That has music in

it for the school-children, who come back to the bright home; but to the widow, oh, how different! Home again, but how empty! Yet we may learn, even from Naomi, that rest and refreshment come to hearts that trust in God their Saviour; and we may learn too what mistakes we make. Naomi said, "Why call ye me Naomi, seeing that the Lord hath testified against me?" Natural enough; but life was still to have a pleasant side for her.—W. M. S.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER II. 1--9.

It is by way of introduction to the remaining narrative that the writer says—

Ver. 1.—**And Naomi had, on her husband's side, a friend.** The C'tib reading עֲרֵיבָה (absolute עֲרֵיבָה) is much to be preferred to the K'ri עֲרֵיבָה. But עֲרֵיבָה is ambiguous in import. It primarily means *known, well-known, acquainted, an acquaintance* (see Job xix. 14; Ps. lv. 13; lxxviii. 8, 18). But as intimate acquaintances, especially in a primitive and comparatively unwelded state of society, are generally found within the circle of kinsfolk, the word may be used, and is here used, in reference to a *kinsman*. The Vulgate translates it *consanguineus*. The translation is interpretatively correct; but the original term is less definite, and hence, in virtue of the ambiguity, there is not absolute redundancy in the appended clause, *of the family or clan of Elimelech*. This friend of Naomi on her husband's side is said, in King James's version, to be a *mighty man of wealth*. But the expression so rendered has, in the very numerous passages in which it occurs, a conventional import that stretches out in a different and nobler direction. It is the expression that is so frequently translated "a mighty man of valour" (see Josh. i. 14; vi. 2; viii. 3; x. 7; Judges vi. 12; xi. 1, &c.). In only one other passage is it rendered as it is by King James's translators in the passage before us, viz., in 2 Kings xv. 20. There it is correctly so translated, interpretatively. Here there seems to be a leaning in the same direction, and yet it is not strongly pronounced. Cassel, however, takes the other cue, and translates "a valiant hero." "Probably," says he, "he had distinguished himself in the conflicts of Israel with their enemies." The expression originally means "strong in strength" (*δυνατός τοῦ σώματος*, Sept.), but is ambiguous in consequence of the many-sided import of the latter word עֲרֵיבָה, which means originally, either *strength*, and then *valour*; or, *clannish following* (see Raabe), and then *military host, or force, or forces*; also, *faculty or ability*, and then, as so often "answering all things," *riches* or *wealth*. The idea of the writer seems to be that the friend of the

widow's husband was a *strong and substantial yeoman*. He was of the family or clan of Elimelech. The word *family* is conventionally too narrow, and the word *clan* too broad, to represent the import of עֲרֵיבָה as here used. The idea intended lies somewhere between. **And his name was Boaz.** The root of this name is not found, apparently, in Hebrew, as was supposed by the older philologists, and hence its essential idea is as yet undetermined. Raabe finds its original form in the Sanscrit *bhuvanti*, which yields the idea of *prosperousness*.

Ver. 2.—**And Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi, Let me go, I pray thee, to the cornfields, that I may glean among the ears after whosoever shall show me favour.** In modern style one would not, in referring, at this stage of the narrative, to Ruth, deem it in the least degree necessary or advantageous to repeat the designation "the Moabitess." The repetition is antique, and calls to mind the redundant particularisation of legal phraseology—"the aforesaid Ruth, the Moabitess." She was willing and wishful to avail herself of an Israelitish privilege accorded to the poor, the privilege of glean- ing after the reapers in the harvest-fields (see Levit. xix. 9; xxiii. 22; Deut. xxiv. 19). Such glean- ing was a humiliation to those who had been accustomed to give rather than to get. But Ruth saw, in the pinched features of her mother-in-law, that there was now a serious difficulty in keeping the wolf outside the door. And hence, although there would be temptation in the step, as well as humiliation, she resolved to avail herself of the harvest season to gather as large a store as possible of those nutritious cereals which form the staff of life, and which they would grind for themselves in their little handmill or quern. She said, with beautiful courtesy, "Let me go, I pray thee;" or, "I wish to go, if you will please to allow me." Such is the force of the peculiar Hebrew idiom. "There is no place," says Lawson, "where our tongues ought to be better governed than in our own houses." **To the cornfields.** Very literally, "to the field." It is the language of townspeople, when referring to the land round about the town that was kept under tillage. It was not customary to separate cornfield from

cornfield by means of walls and hedges. A simple furrow, with perhaps a stone here and there, or a small collection of stones, sufficed, as in Switzerland at the present day, to distinguish the patches or portions that belonged to different proprietors. Hence the singular word *field*, as comprehending the sum-total of the adjoining unenclosed ground that had been laid down in grain. "Though the gardens and vineyards," says Horatio B. Hackett, "are usually surrounded by a stone wall or hedge of prickly pear, the grain-fields, on the contrary, though they belong to different proprietors, are not separated by any enclosure from each other. The boundary between them is indicated by heaps of small stones, or sometimes by single upright stones, placed at intervals of a rod or more from each other. This is the ancient landmark of which we read in the Old Testament" ('Illustrations of Scripture,' p. 110). The word *field* in Hebrew, *חֵפְז*, denotes radically, not so much *plain*, as *ploughed land* (see Raabe's 'Glossar'). In English there is a slightly varied though corresponding idiom lying at the base of the Teutonic term in use. A *field* (German *Feld*) is a *clearance*, a place where the trees of the original forest have been *felled*. The expression, that I may glean 'among' the ears, proceeds on the assumption that Ruth did not expect that she would "make a clean sweep" of all the straggled ears. There might likely be other gleaners besides herself, and even though there should not, she could not expect to gather all. *After whosever shall show me favour.* A peculiarly antique kind of structure in the original: "after whom I shall find favour in his eyes." Ruth speaks as if she thought only of one reaper, and he the proprietor. She, as it were, instinctively conceives of the labourers as "hands." And she said to her, *Go, my daughter.* Naomi yielded; no doubt at first reluctantly, yet no doubt also in a spirit of grateful admiration of her daughter-in-law, who, when she could not lift up her circumstances to her mind, brought down her mind to her circumstances.

Ver. 3.—Ruth, having obtained the consent of her mother-in-law, went, and came, and gleaned in the field after the reapers. That is, she "went forth," viz., from the city, "and came to the cornfields, and gleaned." "There are some," says Lawson, "whose virtue and industry lie only in their tongues. They say, and do not. But Ruth was no less diligent in business than wise in resolution." The later Jews had a set of fantastic bye-laws concerning gleanings, detailed by Maimonides. One of them was, that if only one or two stalks fell from the sickle or hand of the reaper, these should be left lying for the gleaners; but if *three stalks*

fell, then the whole of them belonged to the proprietor (see Carpzov's 'Collegium Rabbinico-Biblicum,' p. 242). Happily for Ruth, her steps were so ordered that the field which she entered as a gleaner belonged to Elimelech's kinsman, Boaz. And it so happened, runs the story, that it was the portion of the fields that belonged to Boaz, who was of the kindred of Elimelech.

Ver. 4.—On the very day that the Moabitess entered on her gleanings, Boaz, in accordance with his wont, as a good and wise master, visited his harvest-field. And, behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem. The law of kindness was on his lips; and while benevolence was beaming from his countenance, piety was ruling within his heart. He said to the reapers, *Yahveh be with you! And they said to him, Yahveh bless thee!* Courtesy met courtesy. It is a charming scene, and we may reasonably assume that there was reality in the salutations. Such civilities of intercourse between proprietors and their labourers are still, says Dr. W. M. Thomson, common in the East. "*The Lord be with you!*" is merely the *Allah m'akum!* of ordinary parlance; and so too the response, *The Lord bless thee!*" ('The Land and the Book,' p. 648). Modern Moslems are particular in the matter of salutations. "Abuhurairah reports that he heard Mohammed say, *You will not enter into paradise until you have faith, and you will not complete your faith until you love one another, and that is shown by making salaam to friends and strangers*" (Kitto's 'Bible Illustrations,' in loc.).

Ver. 5.—And Boaz said to the young man who was set over the reapers, *Whose is that young woman?* His eye had been instantaneously arrested by the handsome stranger. Perhaps, as Jarchi remarks, he took note of the modest and graceful carriage of her person while she picked up industriously the straggled stalks. It is too Rabbinic, however, and artificial, finical, bizarre, to suppose with the same Jewish annotator that Boaz would notice with admiration that, while she picked up zealously all available couples of stalks, she left the triplets in the field unappropriated! The question which he put to the overseer is not *who* but *whose* is that young woman? She had not the gait or air of an ordinary pauper, and hence he wondered if she could belong to any of the families in Bethlehem.

Ver. 6.—And the young man who was set over the reapers replied and said, *She is a Moabitish young woman who returned with Naomi from the land of Moab.* The young man had already received, no doubt from her own lips, particulars regarding the attractive stranger. Instead of the free definitive rendering of Luther and King

James's English version, "*the Moabitish damsel*," it is better, with Michaelis, Wright, Raabe, to adhere to the original indefiniteness, "*a Moabitish maiden*." Note the Zeugmatic use of the word *returned* as applied here, as well as in ch. i. 22, not only to Naomi, but also to Ruth. It is thus used on the same Zeugmatic principle as the word *die* in Gen. xlvii. 19: "Wherefore shall we *die* before thine eyes, both *we* and *our land*?"

Ver. 7.—The steward continues his account of Ruth. She had respectfully solicited leave to glean. She said, Let me glean, I pray thee, and gather in bundles after the reapers. The expression, "and gather in bundles," is in Hebrew וַיִּקְצֹץ וַיִּבְרֹךְ, and is rendered in King James's version, as also by Coverdale, Tremellius, Castellio, Luther, Michaelis, "and gather among" or "beside the sheaves." But such a request on the part of Ruth would seem to be too bold, the more especially as we find Boaz afterwards giving instructions to the young men to allow her, without molestation, to glean "even between the sheaves" (ver. 15). Hence Pagnin's free version is to be preferred, "and gather bundles" (*et congregabo manipulos*). Carpov pleads for the same interpretation, and translates thus: "Let me, I pray thee, glean, and collect the gleanings into bundles" (*colligam obsecro spicas, collectasque accumulem in manipulos*). Montanus too adopts it, and Raabe likewise (*und sammele zu Haufen*). The steward praises Ruth's industry. And she came, and has remained ever since the morning until just now. She had worked diligently, with scarcely any intermission, from early morning. Drusus says that the following expression, rendered in King James's version that she tarried a little in the house, occasioned him critical torture (*locus hic et diu et acriter me toruit*). Coverdale also had been inextricably perplexed. He renders it, "And within a litle whyle she wolde have bene gone home agayne." The word *house* troubled these and many other interpreters, as if the reference were to Naomi's dwelling-house in the town. The reference, however, is evidently to a temporary hut, shed, tent, or booth erected in the harvest-field for the siesta of the workers, and the accommodation of the master, when he was visiting by day, or exercising supervision by night. We would translate the clause thus—"Her resting at the hut (has been) little." Her siesta in the shade of the hut was but brief. She felt as if she could not afford a long repose.

Ver. 8.—And Boaz said to Ruth. We are to suppose that Boaz, having communicated with his overseer, and having given some instructions to his reapers, and likewise to

the young women who bound the reaped corn into sheaves, moved onward to the place where Ruth, keeping modestly far in the rear, was gleaning. He entered into conversation with her, and, among other things, said to her, Hearest thou not, my daughter? A grave antique way of drawing special attention to what is about to follow. "My daughter" is a fatherly expression, appropriate on the part of an elderly person when addressing a young woman. Do not go to glean in the other field. Pointing, no doubt, as he spoke, to a 'parcel' of adjoining fields, belonging to a neighbour proprietor. Boaz's interest and sympathy went out strong, all at once, toward the daughter-in-law of his deceased relative. His heart was smitten with admiration for the modest and fascinating widow. He said further to her, as he walked on along with her in the direction of the reapers, and also do not pass on hence. The expression is not a redundant repetition of the preceding utterance. It was intended, apparently, to direct Ruth to a particular line of gleaning-ground, probably right behind the sheaf-binders, which it would be advantageous for her to occupy. He would point it out with his hand. And so keep close by my young women. Their proximity would give the stranger a feeling of security, and her nearness to them in their work would be manifestly for her benefit.

Ver. 9.—Boaz continues his talk, led on by an interest that was, probably, surprising to himself. Let thine eyes be on the field which they are reaping. He feels increasingly anxious concerning the fascinating stranger, and gives her excellent counsel. "Let not thine eyes be wiled away, wanderingly, from the work on which thou art so praiseworthy engaged." And go thou behind 'them.' The reference is not to the same parties, who are indeterminately spoken of in the preceding clause—"which 'they' are reaping." A determinate feminine pronoun makes it evident that the reference is to the maidens, who were working in the rear of the reapers (וְאַחֲרֵיהֶם post eas). Have not I charged the young men not to touch thee? A fine euphemistic injunction; that was best obeyed, however, when most literally construed. And when thou thirstest, go to the jars, and drink of whatever the young men may draw. Most likely it would be from the well that was "by the gate" of the city that the young men would draw—that very well of which her illustrious descendant, King David, spake, when he "longed, and said, O that one would give me drink of the water of the well in Bethlehem, which is by the gate" (see 2 Sam. xxiii. 14, 15; 1 Chron. xi. 17, 18). When the water was drawn by the young men,

then the maidens would carry the filled jars upon their heads to the resting-place. Gleaners could not be expected to get the freedom of the water which was thus so laboriously drawn, and then fatiguingly carried from a distance. But Boaz made Ruth free, and thus conferred on her a distinguishing privilege, that must have been at once most acceptable and most valuable. The Vulgate renders the last clause too freely—"of which the young men 'drink.'" The familiar well referred to "appears,"

says Dean Stanley, "close by the gate" of the town ('Sinai and Palestine,' p. 163). Yet not very close. "It is," says Dr. John Wilson, "less than half a mile distant from the present village, and is in a rude enclosure, and consists of a large cistern with several small apertures" ('Lands of the Bible,' vol. i. p. 399). Dr. Wilson has no doubt of its identity, though Dr. Robinson hesitated to come to the same conclusion ('Researches,' vol. ii. p. 158).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—9.—*The harvest-field.* RUTH WAS EAGER TO WORK (see ver. 2). 1. Work is honourable; it is wholesome; inspiring too; the best antidote to *ennui*. If not immoderate, nothing is so efficacious in giving full development to man's *physique*; nothing is so potent to put reins upon passions, and a curb on the tendency to morbid imaginations. All great men and women have been diligent workers. Jesus worked. He who is his Father and ours "worketh hitherto." 2. Ruth did not hesitate to stoop to very lowly work. She was willing and wishful to glean in the harvest-fields (see ver. 2). She humbled herself, and was free from the pride which goes before a fall. She "descended ascendingly." It was in the school of adversity that she had been taught. All honest work is honourable. Dignity is lent to the humblest labours when they are undertaken in a spirit of magnanimity. 3. Ruth expressed her wish to her mother-in-law, and solicited her approval. "Let me go, I pray thee, to the cornfields, that I may glean among the ears after whosoever shall show me favour" (ver. 2). The request was put in a beautifully deferential way. Nowhere is courtesy so precious as in the home. It is comely when displayed by juniors to seniors. It is charming when displayed by seniors to juniors. 4. Naomi yielded to Ruth's request, and said, "Go, my daughter." But we may be sure that it would cost her a pang to give her consent. The tears would start as she turned aside and said, "Is it come to this?" of it. 5. "A Divinity" was "shaping Ruth's ends," and leading her by a way she knew not. She was unconsciously led, as if by a guardian angel sent forth to minister, until she lighted on a field belonging to Boaz, a near kinsman of her own. "And she went forth, and came to the cornfields, and gleaned, and it so happened that it was the portion of the fields that belonged to Boaz, who was of the kindred of Elimelech" (ver. 3). While the Divinity was thus "shaping her ends" for her, she was herself, to the utmost of her little ability, busy in "rough-hewing them." God's agency does not supersede man's, nor does man's supersede God's. Each of us should be able to say, "My Father worketh hitherto, and so do I."

BOAZ ENTERS ON THE SCENE. 1. He had some preparation for the part he was about to act in the nearness of his relationship to Elimelech. In the absence of infinite comprehensiveness, it is right, as well as natural, for friends to take a special interest in friends. 2. Though not a "husband," he was a "husbandman." He had a *house*, and was a *house-band*. He was likewise conspicuous for good *husbandry*. He was in some respects a model *husbandman*. Note his habit of personal inspection and superintendence (see ver. 4, and ch. iii. 3). Note his courtesy to his workers as he passed along: "Yahveh be with you!" (ver. 4). Note the hearty response which his courtesy elicited from his men: "Yahveh bless thee!" Note his habit of making inquiries of his overseer in reference to the state of his affairs (ver. 5). 3. In position he was a substantial yeoman (ver. 1). Stout in person, we may suppose. Stout in principle. Substantial in those resources that make *wealth* contribute to *weal*. 4. The reason of his loneliness at home is not hinted at. Perhaps some great sorrow lay buried in his breast; perhaps some bright, sylph-like form lay buried in the grave. 5. He was now, as regards years, an elder in Bethlehem. Most likely all hopes of a brightened home had been for long lying dormant in his spirit. As to his age, it may be inferred from the fatherly way in which he addressed Ruth: "Hearest thou, my daughter?" (ver. 8).

BOAZ AND RUTH. 1. Scarcely had Boaz entered his field, when his eye was arrested by the vision of an elegant and beautiful gleaner, altogether unlike all the rest whom he saw in his field, or had ever seen before. He said to his steward, "Whose young woman is this?" 2. His question was answered, and other information of a highly satisfactory description was communicated. The young woman was a Moabite, who had accompanied home Naomi, her unfortunate mother-in-law (ver. 6). She had, with unwonted respectfulness, solicited liberty to glean. "She said, Let me glean, I pray thee, and gather in bundles, after the reapers" (ver. 7). She had been peculiarly diligent since early morning. "She came, and has remained ever since the morning, till just now" (ver. 7). Nor had she availed herself much of the siesta-booth. "Her resting at the hut has been little" (ver. 7). She seemed to grudge every moment that was not devoted to work. 3. Having obtained this information, Boaz wended his way to Ruth, speaking to the young men as he passed. When he came up to her, he was at once thrilled with admiration. He expressed to her his desire that she should continue on his fields all through the harvest season. "Hearest thou not, my daughter? Go not to glean on other fields." He showed her, moreover, where she could glean to the best advantage. "Pass not on hence; keep close by my young women." He informed her that, in passing along, he had enjoined the young men not to annoy her. "Have I not charged the young men not to touch thee?" He added that she was to be sure to make full use of the water that was drawn by the young men, and carried to the field by the maidens. "When thou art thirsty, go to the jars, and drink of what the young men have drawn" (ver. 9). In all this we see the beginning of the reward which was, in the providence of God, conferred on noble, self-surrendering, self-sacrificing Ruth. The heart of Boaz was moving toward her. The blessing of the Most High was descending on her. So, in one form or another, will it descend on all who, in their different spheres, carry with them, according to the measure of their capacity, the spirit that, in beautiful activity, stirred and heaved within the heart of the Moabitish gleaner.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ch. i. 22; ii. 3.—*The gleaner.* Bethlehem, "the house of bread," was famous for the pastures of its hills, and for the rich cornfields in its fertile valleys. The barley-harvest usually happened in April, and it was then that Naomi and Ruth returned to the village of Judah with which their names are associated. The Mosaic law sanctioned the practice of gleaning, commanded that the produce of the fields and vineyards should not be wholly removed, but that a portion should be left "for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow." Ruth had, therefore, a right to glean.

I. Ruth's gleaning indicates **THE POVERTY OF HER CONDITION.** None but the necessitous would undertake such an occupation. Naomi and she must indeed have returned empty. In our land, and in our days, happily for the poor, there is always more remunerative work to be had by the industrious poor than this, which accordingly has, with the growing prosperity of the country, almost dropped out of use.

II. Ruth's **ABSENCE OF PRIDE** is very apparent. The family into which she had married had owned some of the adjoining land; but in changed circumstances she was not too proud to mingle with the gleaners, and in lowly guise to gather ears of corn.

III. We cannot but admire Ruth's **VIRTUOUS INDUSTRY.** Boaz afterwards said, in praise of her conduct, "Thou followedst not young men." She chose a blameless, though laborious, life. An example to all to avoid dependence, and to cultivate the habit of self-reliance and diligence.

IV. Remark Ruth's **FILIAL LOVE.** She worked not only for herself, but for her mother-in-law, and found a pleasure in supporting her.

V. **SUCCESS** attends Ruth's honest toil. She gathered barley with her hands; special favour was shown to her; a friend was raised up to assist her; prosperity crowned her efforts. "Thy bread shall be given thee, and thy water shall be sure."—T.

Ver. 3.—*Her hap.* Words could hardly be more suggestive than these. They may be applied to circumstances in the life of every one of us. There have been turning-points in our history; we took one path rather than another, and with results

RUTH.

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(as we now see) how momentous to ourselves! So was it with Ruth of Moab, the gleaner.

I. MANY OF OUR ACTIONS ARE PERFORMED WITHOUT ANY THOUGHT OR INTENTION REGARDING THEIR RESULTS. In ordinary affairs how often do we decide and act without any special sense of the wisdom of one course rather than another! And there are positions in which our choice seems quite immaterial. It seemed of little consequence in which field this young foreigner, this friendless widow, went to glean a few ears of barley. So is it often with us. Shall we go to such a place? shall we pay such a visit? shall we form such an acquaintance? shall we read such a book? shall we venture on such a remark? shall we write such a note?

II. UNFORESEEN AND IMPORTANT ISSUES MAY DEPEND UPON CASUAL ACTIONS. Though it seemed of little consequence in which field Ruth gleaned, "*her hap* was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz," and from this fact sprang results of the greatest importance. "*Her hap*" determined her marriage, her wealth, her happiness and that of her mother-in-law, her union with Israel, her motherhood, her position as an ancestress of David and of Christ. In such seemingly insignificant causes originate the most momentous issues. Thus oftentimes it comes to pass that family relationships are formed, a professional career is determined; nay, religious decision may be brought about, life-work for Christ may be appointed, eternal destiny is affected.

Lessons:—1. Regard nothing as insignificant. 2. Look out for, and follow, the leadings of Divine providence. 3. "In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths!"—T.

Vers. 4.—*Salutations*. It is a pleasant picture of old-world life among the ancient Hebrews, this of the "mighty man of wealth" coming down from his house to his cornfields to watch the work of the reapers, the progress of the harvest. Boaz seems to have lived on friendly terms with those in his employment, and to have taken an interest in them and in their toils. A lesson for all masters and employers of labour. And how picturesque the scene when the proprietor meets his labourers, and they exchange the customary greeting of the East, sanctified by Hebrew piety! *Salutations* are—

I. SANCTIONED BY SCRIPTURAL USAGE. *E.g.* When the mower filleth his hand, and he that bindeth sheaves his bosom, "they which go by say, The blessing of the Lord be upon you: we bless you in the name of the Lord!" (Ps. cxxix.). *E.g.* Angels are represented as greeting those they are commissioned to visit. Gideon was saluted thus: "The Lord is with thee;" and Mary thus: "Hail, highly favoured one! the Lord is with thee." *E.g.* Christ himself was wont to greet his disciples, saying, "Peace be with you!" *E.g.* The apostles closed their letters with greetings and benedictions. "The Lord of peace himself give you peace always by all means: the Lord be with you all!"

II. FOUNDED UPON DIVINELY-IMPLANTED PRINCIPLES OF HUMAN NATURE. They presume our social existence and nature. They imply sympathy. They express friendly and benevolent feelings.

III. CONDUCIVE TO THE EASY AND PLEASANT INTERCOURSE OF HUMAN SOCIETY. We all feel the influence of courteous address, polite expressions, and the minor benevolences of life. Christians should not be offended or contemptuous when well-meaning persons accost them with hand-shaking and minute inquiries after health, &c.; if well meant, courtesies should be kindly accepted.

IV. In the case of pious persons, EXPRESSIVE OF PRAYERFUL WISHES FOR GOOD. How many of our common salutations have their origin in piety and prayer! So, in the text, The Lord be with you! The Lord bless thee! So with such phrases as, Adieu! Good-bye! Good morning! God bless you! Farewell! They all convey a desire, a prayer. Let our salutations be sincere, and let our language and our conduct prove that they are so.—T.

Vers. 5—14.—*Filial piety and fidelity recognised and recompensed*. As "the whole city was moved" at Naomi's return, it is not surprising that the foreman over the reapers was able to answer the inquiry of Boaz—"Whose damsel is this?"

Though Boaz had not seen her before, he knew her story, and was evidently pleased to meet her. His judgments were just, his feelings were appropriate, his language was considerate, his conduct was generous. The character of Boaz commands our respect; and his treatment of Ruth, from beginning to end, was not only blameless, it was admirable. As we follow the simple and interesting narrative, we observe—

I. **FILIAL PIETY AWAKENING INTEREST.** The beauty of the Moabitess, though in complexion or figure she was "not like unto one of the handmaidens" of Boaz, her modest demeanour and graceful movements, all excited remark and admiration; but, probably, had he not known of her coming back with Naomi, and of all she had done unto her mother-in-law, he would not have addressed her. His interest expressed itself in kindly language and treatment, such as were very suitable in the circumstances. In ver. 11 Boaz acknowledges, in appreciative language, her disinterested devotion.

II. **FILIAL PIETY PROMPTS AN OBSERVER'S FERVENT PRAYER.** In ver. 12 Boaz is recorded to have said, "The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust." Who can contemplate a life of self-sacrifice, of affectionate devotion and service, without asking God to reward it with a recompense not in man's power to bestow? No prayers are purer and more effectual than those presented for a devoted, dutiful, affectionately ministering daughter!

III. **FILIAL PIETY SECURES A GENEROUS AND PRACTICAL RECOMPENSE.** Boaz was so gratified by what he heard of Ruth's conduct, and what he observed in her bearing and language, that he became the agent of Providence in rewarding her excellence. He bade her abide in his fields; he charged the young men to treat her with respect; he bade her take with welcome of the water, the wine, the bread, and the parched corn provided for the reapers. She found favour in his sight, and he comforted her by his friendly words.

Lesson:—Divine providence does not overlook human virtue. Not that man has merit before God; but the fruits of the spirit are pleasing to the Giver of the Spirit. And God will raise up ministers of recompense for the comfort of his faithful children!—T.

Ver. 4.—"The Lord be with you. And they answered him, The Lord bless thee." Nothing is more beautiful in national history than good feeling between masters and men. Religion alone can inspire this feeling. It fails before mere expediency, and can only be secured by mutual dependence on God and on each other.

I. **THE LIVING PRESENCE.** The Lord with us means courage and consolation—courage to face difficulty, and consolation in all times of depression and disheartenment. Christ has given us his own gracious promise, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."

II. **THE HARVEST TOIL.** "Said unto the reapers." It is hard work everywhere in the glaring heat to put in the sickle, and to gather up the sheaves. We may learn from the spectacle the blessed lesson of our duty in relation to others. Let us try to cheer and inspire. Some are full of cold indifference, and others of critical complaint. We little know what a word of cheer does for others. Blame makes the hands hang down, and quenches that music of the heart which makes work pleasant and successful. Encouragement is like fresh strength to weary hearts.

III. **THE KIND RESPONSE.** The benediction of Boaz awakens a corresponding benediction from the reapers. The harp answers to the hand that sweeps it. Men are to us very much what we are to them. "The Lord bless thee." We need never despair of this reward. Love begets love. Confidence begets confidence. Blessing awakens blessing. This is what we long and pray for—cessation of war between capital and labour, and mutual benediction.—W. M. S.

Ver. 7.—"I pray thee let me glean." In rural life no sight is pleasanter than the hour when the gleaners come in and "gather after the reapers among the sheaves." It bespeaks "something to spare." It is like the "commons" or the grass by the roadside for the poor man's cattle. We all like the spectacle of plenty; we all like

the consciousness that the overflowings of the cup of plenty are to be tasted by others.

I. THERE IS WORK FOR THE HUMBLEST TO DO. We may not be permitted to take a leading part even in God's great harvest-field, but we can all do something. We can glean words of comfort to carry to the bedsides of the sick and the homes of the poor. We can glean in the fields of Scripture lessons for the little ones, and promises for the broken-hearted. Thank God there is a place in the world for gleaners as well as reapers.

II. THERE IS WORK TO BE SOUGHT OUT. It is asked for. "I pray thee." How many complain that no one finds a service for them. They are waiters and idlers because no one gives them a commission, or secures them a suitable field. They wait to be sought out, instead of saying, "Here am I, send me." They wait to be besought, instead of beseeching for work. What a glorious day for the Church of Christ everywhere when men seek for the honour of service.

III. ALL WORK DEMANDS PERSEVERANCE. How constant Ruth is! "She came, and hath continued from the morning until now." How much spasmodic energy there is; how many ploughs are left mid-furrow; how many begin and do not finish. It is not genius that wins the goal, but plodding earnestness. Ye did run well, glean well; what doth hinder you?—W. M. S.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER II. 10—17.

Ver. 10.—RUTH did not seize the opportunity for bewailing the hardship of the lot to which she had been reduced, and which now constrained her to undertake a species of work which at one time she little anticipated. With beautiful humility and modesty, and in the profoundest gratitude, she accepted wonderingly the kindness of Boaz. **And she fell on her face.** A rather remarkable expression, physiologically viewed. Her face was part of herself. How then could she fall on it? It was part of that which fell, and yet she is said to fall *upon* (עָלָה) it, as if it had been underneath the self-hood that fell. It was what was undermost as she bowed herself, so that the pressure of the sum-total of the body fell on it as she gracefully stooped. **And prostrated herself to the ground.** Thus completing, and doubtless in no sprawling or clumsy way, her respectful obeisance. Her face would be made, with æsthetic delicacy of movement, to touch the ground. **Wherefore have I found favour in thine eyes?** She was surprised, amazed, bewildered. **So that thou takest notice of me, and I a stranger!** Boaz had done far more than merely *take notice* of her. But, with equal gratitude and felicity, she specifies not the culminating acts of kindness, but the very first step that her benefactor had taken. He began by *taking notice* of her. There is an interesting *paranomasia* in the two words רָאָה and נִקְרָא. A foreigner, though *unknown*, and just indeed because *unknown*, is naturally *noted* and *noticed*.

Ver. 11.—Boaz's interest and admiration

grew. **And Boaz answered and said to her, It has been fully showed to me, all that thou hast done toward thy mother-in-law since the death of thy husband: and that thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and hast come to a people whom heretofore thou knewest not.** When Boaz says, "It has been fully showed to me," he probably refers to the information which he had received from his overseer. The expression rendered "fully showed" is a fine specimen of a very antique idiom, *showed-showed* (הִנֵּה הָיָה). "Toward thy mother-in-law." The preposition which we render "toward" is literally "with," which, indeed, when laid side by side with the Hebrew preposition, looks as if it were organically identical. (הַיָּם = *eth*. Compare the old Hebrew *etha* with the Sanscrit *udāh*. See Raabe's 'Glossar'). The expression which we render "heretofore" is literally "yesterday and the day before," a very primitive way of representing *time past*. It must have been like balm to the anxious heart of Ruth to hear from the lips of such a man as Boaz so hearty a "well-done." "Ruth," says the venerable Lawson, "showed no disposition to praise herself. She did not claim a right to glean from what she had done for Naomi, but wondered that such kindness should be showed by Boaz to her who was a stranger, and she hears the voice of praise from the mouth of one whose commendations were a very great honour. No saying was oftener in the mouth of Jesus than this, *He that exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.*"

Ver. 12.—**May Yahveh requite thy work, and may thy recompense be complete from**

Yahveh God of Israel, to trust under whose wings thou art come. Already there were streaks of light shooting athwart Boaz's horizon. His very phraseology is getting tipped with unwonted beauty. He sees Ruth cowering trustfully under the outstretched wings of Him who is "good to all, and whose tender mercies are over all his works" in all lands (see Pa. xci. 1—4). The metaphor, says Fuller, "is borrowed from a hen, which, with her clucking, summons together her straggling chickens, and then outstretcheth the fan of her wings to cover them." "Who would not," says Topsell, "forsake the shadow of all the trees in the world to be covered under 'such' wings!"

Ver. 13.—*May I continue to find favour, sir, in thine eyes, for indeed thou hast comforted me, and cheered the heart of thine handmaid, and yet I have not the position of one of thy maidens.* To be one of his maidens was, in her estimation, to be in a most desirable condition. She could not aspire to that. But as he had spoken so graciously to her heart, and soothed its sorrows, she trusted he would still befriend her. נָשָׂא should not be rendered, with the Vulgate, "I have found" (*inveni*); nor, with Tremellius and Junius, "I find" (*invenio*); but, with Piscator, optatively, "may I find" (*inveniam*), that is, "may I still find, may I continue to find." So Luther, Coverdale, and Michaelis. The courtesy-expression, rendered in King James's version "my lord" (אֲדֹנָי = *Mein-Herr* or *Monsieur*), is used, as Carpov remarks, in "humility and civility."

Ver. 14.—*And Boaz, at meal-time, said to her, Come along hither.* Luther, Coverdale, and King's James's English translators took the expression "at meal-time" as part of the report of Boaz's words: "And Boaz said, *At meal-time come along hither.*" But it is evidently to be taken, in accordance with the Masoretic punctuation, as the historical statement of the narrator: "At meal-time, Boaz said, *Come along hither.*" At meal-time Boaz rejoined Ruth, and said to her, "Come along hither." Then they would walk along in company, till they reached the siesta-hut. *And eat of the bread, that is going, and dip thy morsel in the vinegar, or the sour wine* that was quite a favourite beverage with out-door workers. It had a peculiarly cooling and refreshing effect. It corresponded to the *posca* used by the Roman soldiery, and would, according to circumstances and individual taste, be taken either "neat" or diluted with water. *And she sat by the side of the reapers.* Probably along with the other young women, although the reference to them is accidentally overlapped by

the specification of the male workers. *And he prepared for her a bunch of parched corn.* עֲבֵי is only conjecturally rendered "reached" in King James's version, and by many other translators. The rendering is given under the leadership of the Chaldee Paraphrast, who explains the word by רָכַח, which is a pure Chaldee word for "reached." But light is thrown on the old Hebrew word by both Arabic and Sanscrit cognates, as well as by the Septuagint version (ἰβόρις). It meant *to bind into a bunch* or *bunches* (see Fürst and Raabe). The word is illustrated by modern Oriental usage. Dr. W. M. Thomson says, "Harvest is the time for parched corn. It is made thus:—A quantity of the best ears, not too ripe, are plucked with the stalks attached. These are tied into small parcels; a blazing fire is kindled with dry grass and thorn bushes, and the corn-heads are held in it until the chaff is mostly burnt off. The grain is thus sufficiently roasted to be eaten, and it is a favourite article all over the country" ('The Land and the Book,' p. 648). Mr. Legh, in like manner, states, in MacMichael's *Journey*, 1819, that, travelling in harvest-time in the country east of the Dead Sea, they one day rested near some cornfields, "where one of the Arabs, having plucked some green ears of corn, parched them for us by putting them into the fire, and then, when roasted, rubbing out the grain in his hands" (Kitto's *Pictorial Bible*, *in loc.*). Sometimes, however, the parched corn is otherwise prepared. Dr. Robinson says, "In one field, as we approached Kubeibeh, nearly 200 reapers and gleaners were at work; the latter being nearly as numerous as the former. A few were taking their refreshment, and offered us some of their 'parched corn.' In the season of harvest the grains of wheat, not yet fully dry and hard, are roasted in a pan or on an iron plate, and constitute a very palatable article of food. This is eaten with bread, or instead of it. Indeed, the use of it is so common at this time among the labouring classes, that this parched wheat is sold in the markets; and it was among our list of articles to be purchased at Hebron for our journey to Wady Mûsa. The Arabs, it was said, prefer it to rice; but this we did not find to be the case. The whole scene of the reapers and gleaners, and their 'parched corn,' gave us a lively representation of the story of Ruth and the ancient harvest-time in the fields of Boaz" ('Biblical Researches,' vol. ii. p. 394, ed. 1841). Boaz had given Ruth a kind of Benjamin's portion of parched corn. She could not use it all. *And she ate, and was satisfied, and left over.* Carefully reserving, however, and "basketing up" the liberal surplus.

Ver. 15.—**And she rose to glean : and Boaz charged his young men, saying, Even between the sheaves let her glean, and do not affront her.** Boaz would probably thus speak in the hearing of Ruth herself, so that, without any fear of reproach, she might feel free to take full advantage of the privilege accorded her. Boaz wished her to gather a large glean, no doubt rightly conjecturing that there must have been for some time past but little superfluity in the larder of Naomi. The space "between the sheaves," as distinguished from the spaces outside their line, would probably be the part whither the maidens conveyed their collected armfuls, and where they bound them into sheaves. It would thus be the place where there would be the greatest number of 'waifs.' It would also be the place in which 'unprincipled gleaners might have the best opportunity for stealing from the sheaves. Boaz felt unbounded confidence in Ruth, and said to the reapers, "Affront her not," namely, by saying or insinuating anything to the effect that she was either pilf'ring, on the one hand, or making herself too forward, on the other. The Vulgate version completely merges out of sight the poetic beauty and tenderness of the injunction by rendering it thus : "Do not hinder her."

Ver. 16.—**And even of set purpose draw out for her from the bundles, and leave them, and let her glean them, and do not find fault with her.** His kindness grows as he sees her, or speaks concerning her. He gives additional injunctions in her favour, both to the young men and to the maidens, though the line of distinction between the two sexes dips at times entirely out of sight. When the sheaf-makers had gathered an armful of stalks, and there seemed to be so clean a sweep that none were left behind, then they were of set purpose (*de industria*) to draw out some from the bunches or bundles, and leave them lying. The act of deliberate, as opposed to unintentional, drawing, is expressed by the emphatic repetition of the verb **וַיִּסְתֵּן**. The verb thus repeated was a puzzle to the older expositors, inclusive of all the Hebrew commentators. But comparative philology has clearly determined its radical import, and thus illuminated its use in the passage before us. It does not here mean "spoil," though that is its usual signification. Nor can it mean "let fall," as in King James's version. It means **draw out**. **Do not find fault with her.** The word is almost always rendered *rebuke* in our English version ; but the force of the preposition may be represented thus : "do not chide 'with' her." "It was," says Dr. Andrew Thomson, "a thoughtful and delicate form of kindness to Ruth, thus

to increase her gleanings, and yet to make them all appear the fruit of her own industry." "There are persons to be met with in social life who, while possessing the more solid qualities of moral excellence, are singularly deficient in the more graceful. They have honesty, but they have no sensibility ; they have truth, but they are strangely wanting in tenderness. They are distinguished by *whatsoever things are just and pure*, but not by those which are *lovely and of good report*. You have the marble column, but you have not the polish or the delicate tracery on its surface ; you have the rugged oak, but you miss the jasmine or the honeysuckle creeping gracefully around it from its roots. But the conduct of Boaz, as we stand and hear him giving these directions to his reapers, proves the compatibility of those two forms of excellence, and how the strong and the amiable may meet and harmonise in the same character. Indeed, they *do* always meet in the highest forms of moral greatness" ('Studies on the Book of Ruth,' pp. 119, 120).

Ver. 17.—**And she gleaned in the field until the evening, and beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley.** Gathering together her various sheaves, lots, or bundles (see ver. 7), she threshed them with some suitable rod or simple 'flail' (*flagellum*), which she had either brought with her in the morning, as part of her equipment as a gleaner, or had obtained at the hut ; or perhaps, like many others, she would make use of a convenient stone. Speaking of the village of Hûj, near Gaza, Robinson says, "We found the lazy inhabitants still engaged in treading out the barley harvest, which their neighbours had completed long before. *Several women were beating out with a stick handfuls of the grain which they seemed to have gleaned.* One female was grinding with a handmill, turning the mill with one hand, and occasionally dropping in the grain with the other" ('Researches,' vol. ii. p. 385). "In the evening," says Dr. W. M. Thomson, "you might see some poor woman or maiden, that had been permitted to glean on her own account, sitting by the roadside, and beating out with a stick or a stone what she had gathered, as Ruth did. I have often watched this process in various parts of the country" ('The Land and the Book,' p. 647). The diligent gleaner on Boaz's field found, after threshing, that she had nearly an ephah of barley. It would be a considerable load for a female to carry—about a bushel. Josephus mentions incidentally, in his 'Antiquities' (xv. 9, 2), that the Hebrew *cor* or *homer* was equivalent to ten Attic *μέτρηται*. But as the ephah was exactly the tenth part of a *cor* or *homer*, it follows that the Hebrew

ephah was equivalent to the Attic *μίδιμος*. Moreover, just as the ephah was the tenth part of a homer, so the omer was the tenth part of an ephah (Exod. xvi. 36); and thus, if an omer of barley would be somewhat equivalent for nutritive purposes to an omer

of manna, it would be a sufficient daily allowance for a man (see Exod. xvi. 16). Hence Ruth would take home with her what would suffice for several days' sustenance to Naomi and herself.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 10—17.—*The harvest-field again.* Let us return to the Oriental harvest-field. Harvest-fields in general are lively scenes. Emphatically so in the East, where bright weather may be calculated on with almost absolute certainty. Pleasantry and work go hand in hand. Dr. W. M. Thomson, speaking of Philistia, says, "When the fog dispersed, the whole plain appeared to be dotted over with harvesting parties; men reaping, women and children gleaning and gathering the grain into bundles, or taking care of the flocks, which followed closely upon the footsteps of the gleaners. All seemed to be in good humour, enjoying the cool air of the morning. There was singing, alone and in chorus, incessant talking, home-made jokes, and laughing loud and long" ("The Land and the Book," p. 543). The harvest scene as represented on the shield of Achilles may be recalled (see the eighteenth book of the 'Iliad'). 1. We find Boaz and Ruth still standing where we left them (vers. 9, 10). Surely some great attraction is detaining the busy husbandman, a 'man of affairs.' 2. A group of Graces are tripping round about Ruth. There is, firstly, *gratitude*, always lovely and welcome. If in any soul it be meagre, stunted, stunted, the soil of that soul is shallow. There is, secondly, *respectfulness*. "She fell on her face, and did obeisance to the ground" (ver. 10). Respectfulness is the homage that is due to a noble nature, and to him who is the Creator of it. We are to "honour the king." True; but we are likewise to "honour all men" (1 Pet. ii. 17), for there is something kingly after all in the nature of all. Then there is, thirdly, *wonder*. "Why have I found favour in thine eyes, so that thou takest notice of me, and I a stranger?" (ver. 10). Some accept attentions and kindnesses as things of course. Some almost exact them, as if they were dues. Not so the nobler souls. They wonder when distinction is conferred on them. Moses wondered: "Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?" (Exod. iii. 11). David wondered: "Who am I, O Lord God? and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto?" (2 Sam. vii. 18). Paul wondered: "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Eph. iii. 8). 3. Boaz explained to the wondering stranger why it gratified him to show her attention. "It hath been fully showed unto me, all that thou hast done toward thy mother-in-law since the death of thy husband: and that thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and hast come to a people whom heretofore thou knewest not" (ver. 11). His spirit seems to kindle as he proceeds, so that his words become tipped with brightness and beauty. He "winds the robes of ideality around the bareness" of mere facts. (J. Ingelow). He says, "The Lord requite thy work, and may thy recompense be complete from the Lord God of Israel, to trust under whose wings thou art come" (ver. 12). Words "fitly spoken!" "Words spoken in due season!" "How good they are!" A word, in particular, of well-deserved appreciation and commendation is peculiarly "good." It goes to the heart, and is often mighty to animate to victorious courage and hope. Nobler in its aims than "fame," it is yet, like "fame," a "spur, that the clear spirit doth raise, to scorn delights and live laborious days" (Milton). 4. Note the fine expression, "to trust under whose wings thou art come." Compare what the Psalmist says: "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." "He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust" (Ps. xci. 1, 4). Compare what Jesus said: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not" (Matt. xxiii. 37). Compare what the Christian poet says:

“All my trust on thee is stayed ;
 All my help from thee I bring ;
 Cover my defenceless head
 With the shadow of thy wing.”

5. Just as Boaz was turning to complete the supervision of his harvest-field, Ruth, with delicate acknowledgments for the past, prefers a humble request for the future. “May I continue, sir, to find favour in thine eyes ; for indeed thou hast comforted me, and cheered the heart of thine handmaid, and yet I have not the position of one of thy maidens” (ver. 13). Thus from one to the other, under the impulse of some subtle spontaneity, was the shuttle of respectful feeling shot and re-shot. 6. The scene is now shifting. The two separate. Boaz proceeds to attend to the various details of his husbandry. Ruth returns to the monotony of her gleaning. Both exhibit a worthy example of painstaking industry. 7. Time advances. The work proceeds. The sun hastens towards its zenith. The hour for siesta is at hand. Boaz turns once more in the direction of Ruth. He rejoins her, and invites her to accompany him to the place of temporary shelter, refreshment, and rest. “At meal-time Boaz said to her, Come along hither, and eat of the bread, and dip thy morsel in the vinegar” (ver. 14). All the workers—but of course not the gleaners—assemble around the master. Ruth is seated among the rest, and is carefully attended to. “She sat beside the reapers : and Boaz prepared for her a bunch of parched corn, and she ate, and was satisfied, and left over” (ver. 14). Then there is more work. Boaz gives still more liberal instructions to the young men. “Even between the sheaves let her glean, and do not affront her” (ver. 15). “And even of set purpose draw out for her from the bundles, and leave them, and let her glean them, and do not find fault with her” (ver. 16). At length, at the close of the day, Ruth gathered her bundles together, and threshed them, and found that she had about an ephah of barley—as much as a woman could be expected to carry. Thus is the dawn of Ruth’s prosperity growing brighter and brighter, and giving promise of a day that shall be as “the bridal of the earth and sky.” The Lord is “recompensing her work.” The shadows are fleeing.

“As morning in the east,
 Stands winged to mount in day,
 So for a swift surprise of joy
 Our God prepares his way” (Gibbons).

So assuredly will there be a corresponding dayspring from on high to all who, in the midst of thickening trials, maintain their integrity, and engage in “works of faith” and “labours of love.” There may be, there will be, differences in the degree of prosperity and reward, even as star differeth from star in magnitude and lustre. It is not to be expected that all shall have such reversions on earth as were granted to Job and to Ruth. Nevertheless, none will be forgotten. Every several blade of grass will have its own drop of dew. Love on the part of man will be crowned with love on the part of God. And when love rises to Jesus, the ideal Son of man, then it is capped with more love ; for, says he, “my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him” (John xiv. 23). All three will “sup together” (Rev. iii. 20). “Sorrow and sighing will flee away.”

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 15—17.—*Liberality to the poor.* The customs recorded in these chapters remain—many of them—to the present day. As to *gleaning*, Robinson says, “The way led us through open fields, where the people were in the midst of the wheat-harvest. The beautiful tracts of grain were full of reapers of the Henâdy Arabs, and also of gleaners almost as numerous. These were mostly women ; and this department seemed almost as important as the reaping itself, since the latter is done in so slovenly a manner, that not only much falls to the ground, but also many stalks remain uncut. In one field nearly 200 reapers and gleaners were at work, the latter being nearly as numerous as the former.” As to *threshing*, Robinson mentions

that "several women were beating out with a stick handfuls of the grain which they seemed to have gleaned." As to the *parching of corn*, the same writer says, "The grains of wheat, not yet fully dry and hard, are roasted in a pan or on an iron plate, and eaten along with bread, or instead of it." Boaz showed his practical sympathy with the widows of the narrative by giving parched corn to Ruth to eat, and by securing that her gleaning should be even more successful and abundant than was usual with the maidens.

I. Liberality to the poor should ACCORD WITH THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE GIVER.

II. It should TAKE A FORM ADAPTED TO THE WANTS OF THE RECIPIENT.

III. It should BE UNGRUDGING AND GRACEFUL IN ITS BESTOWAL.

IV. It should BE INSPIRED BY THE MEMORY OF THE UNDESERVED BOUNTY OF THE GREAT GIVER, GOD.

V. It should NOT COUNT UPON, though it may have occasion to rejoice in, THE GRATITUDE OF THE BENEFICIARY.—T.

Ver. 10.—"I am a stranger!" What a touching word. In some cities there is the strangers' burying-ground. There they sleep as they lived, separated from their brethren.

I. THE HEBREWS WERE KIND TO STRANGERS. Their Divine revelation gave them injunctions concerning the stranger within their gates. They were to be considerate and kind to the cattle; how much more to those made in the image of God like themselves! The young learnt this lesson; from earliest years they were taught the law while "sitting in the house." Boaz knew all this, and he "lived" it.

II. STRANGERS HAVE SENSITIVE HEARTS. Their experiences make them quick to feel insult or blessing. Never can they quite escape the consciousness, "I am a stranger." In other lands, under other skies, the stranger carries far-away visions of the heart within, which make the spirit pensive. Consequently, care and love are intensely appreciated by them. Religion is the life of love and the death of selfishness wherever it lives and reigns in the heart.

III. STRANGERS IN TIME MAKE A FATHERLAND OF THE NEW HOME. So did Ruth. New ties sprang up; for love looks forward. Children take the place of ancestors, and we live in *them*. How often we are tempted to forget our own lot. "Remember that ye were strangers," therefore deal kindly with them. Think how precious to you was the fellowship of hearts that stole away your sadness as a stranger at school, or in the new city of life and duty. What a consolation it is that we are never strangers in our Father's sight, and that everywhere we may find "home" in God.—W. M. S.

Vers. 12, 13.—"The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee." Here we see that the character of God is gloriously revealed. It is understood by Boaz that God is a God of "rewards," and we need not fear that a mistaken notion of rewards and punishments will prevail amongst students of the Bible. God's highest blessings are given to the soul; but it remains true that even in the earthly life the outworking of duty is blessing.

I. HERE IS THE HISTORIC NAME. "The Lord God of Israel." What memories cluster around that significant sentence! We see in it a "miniature" of all Hebrew deliverance and mercy.

II. HERE IS THE COMPREHENSIVE BLESSING. "A full reward." *That* must refer to the inner self—to the consciousness of heroic fidelity and filial love. Many rewards are precious, but no reward is full that does not "bless us indeed."

III. HERE IS THE HOMELY ANALOGY. "Under whose wings," &c. All nature is taken into the illustrative record of the inspired word. The wing! How strong without. How easily outspread. How "downy" within. So soft! so warm! The rain cannot reach through the outward covering. Notice how roof-like are the arrangements of the feathers, and notice also how *complete* is the canopy.

IV. HERE IS THE PERSONAL TRUST. "Thou art come to trust." We must not forget not alone what God reveals himself as, to us, but what responsibility rests on us, to "rest in the Lord."—W. M. S.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER II. 18—23.

Ver. 18.—And she lifted it up, and went into the city: and her mother-in-law beheld what she had gleaned. She likewise brought forth, and gave to her, what she had left over after she was satisfied. It would be with gratitude and pride that Ruth would let her heavy burden slip off into the hands of Naomi. It would be with gratitude and wonder that Naomi would behold the precious load. Other gentle emotions would stir within the mother-in-law's hungry heart when her beloved daughter-in-law produced and presented the remains of her delightfully refreshing repast at the tent. The expression, "after she was satisfied," is literally, "from her satiety."

Ver. 19.—And her mother-in-law said to her, Where hast thou gleaned to-day? and where hast thou worked? May he who took notice of thee be blessed! The grateful eagerness of the mother-in-law to get full information overflows in a delightful redundancy. "Where hast thou gleaned to-day? and where hast thou worked?" She saw at a glance, from the magnitude of the load, from the bright and beaming countenance of her daughter-in-law, and from the delicious parched corn which the master had given with his own hands, that the day had been crowned with peculiar blessings. The lines had fallen in pleasant places. Hence her womanly and motherly interest to get full particulars. Ruth, on her part, would feel as if a kind of inspiration had seized upon her tongue. And she showed to her mother-in-law with whom she had worked, and she said, The name of the man with whom I worked to-day is Boaz. A thrill would shoot through Naomi's heart as that once familiar name fell upon her ears.

Ver. 20.—And Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, Blessed 'of' Yahveh be he who—. The expression is literally, "Blessed 'to' Yahveh be he who," that is, "Blessed in relation to Yahveh be he who," or "Blessed be he! I carry the desire and prayer up to Yahveh," which just amounts, in meaning, to this: "Blessed 'by' Yahveh be he who." See other instances of the same construction in Gen. xiv. 19, and Ps. cxv. 15. Who has not let go his kindness to the living and to the dead. Some take these words to be descriptive of Yahveh. Others take them to be descriptive of Boaz. If they be regarded in the former point of view, then the foregoing clause must be rendered, not, "Blessed by Yahveh be he who," but, "Blessed be he by Yahveh who." Dr. Cassel assumes, but without any formal

reasoning or apparent reason, that the reference of the relative is to Yahveh, and hence he makes out an ingenious argument in defence of the doctrine, *that those who are dead to us are yet alive to God*—the doctrine of immortality. It is strained. Yet Raabe thinks that the reference is to Yahveh, inasmuch as Naomi had as yet no evidence of Boaz's kindness to the deceased. The reason thus given for carrying the reference up to God is certainly unsatisfactory; for, looking at the subject from the human point of view, it is obvious that Boaz's peculiar kindness to the living *was* his kindness to the deceased; whereas, if we look at the case from the Divine point of view, it is difficult, if not impossible, to account for the discrimination between the living and the dead. The first feeling that sprang up in the heart of Naomi at the mention of the name of Boaz was one of adoration. The next was a generous desire in reference to Boaz himself. She prayed that he might be graciously recompensed by Yahveh for the kindness he had shown that day, both toward the living—Ruth and herself—and toward the deceased—Elimelech and his sons. A man of less noble nature might have been ready, in reference to relatives in reduced circumstances, to ignore the present, and to bury in oblivion the past. After giving scope to her feelings of adoration and benediction, Naomi, with the prompt and practical directness of a true woman, said to her daughter-in-law, The man is near to us, adding immediately, and with a rapid glance at bright contingencies that were in the region of the possible, He is one of our peculiar kinsmen (our *Go'elim*). She meant that he was one of those peculiarly near kinsmen who had a right of redemption over whatever lands may have formerly belonged to her, and the first right of purchase over whatever lands might yet remain in the possession of herself or of her daughter-in-law. Naomi and Ruth, though greatly reduced in circumstances, and painfully pent up in present straits, were far from being paupers. They were proprietors (see ch. iv. 3, 5). But their property was not, for the time being, available for income or sustenance. It had either been farmed out on usufruct or allowed to lie waste. In the absence of the *yod* in יְהוָה we have an instance of *scriptio defectiva*, as distinguished from *scriptio plena*. Such defective manuscryption might be expected to occur occasionally in transcription from dictation, when, as here, the presence or the absence of the letter made no difference in the pro-

nunciation of the reader. Michaelis, however ('*Mosaisches Recht*,' § 137), and Gesenius ('*Thesaurus*,' in *voc.*), instead of regarding the absence of the *yod* as an instance of *scriptio defectiva*, have conjectured that **לִמְנוּ** is a noun, or name, meaning *the second in order of the Go'im*. But, notwithstanding the ingenuity of the conjecture, there is not a shadow of evidence to evince that the Hebrews themselves ever knew of such a word. Nor does the supposition or subsumption of such a word in the least facilitate the construction on the one hand, or illumine the narrative on the other.

Ver. 21.—**And Ruth the Moabitess said.** It seems to us rather remarkable that Ruth should be here again particularised formally as "the Moabitess." There is apparently no discoverable reason for the re-repetition. It is simply antique particularity, not amenable to any literary law—"the said Moabitess." There is a peculiar abruptness in the initial words of what follows:—**Yea also he said to me.** Carpzov and Wright understand them thus: "'Yea' blessed be he, 'for' he said to me." But the word *blessed*, as used by Naomi, is too far removed to make it natural for the *yea* of Ruth's remark to fall back upon it. Her mind and heart were full. She was profoundly affected by the kindness that had been shown to her. Hence she piles up her representation. "*Also*,"—*so may I well speak*,—"for he said to me." **Keep close by my young men, until they have finished all my harvest.** The "young men" are not here discriminated from the "young women" (see ver. 8). The idea, consequently, is not that Ruth was to keep close to them in distinction from the young women. It was understood that she should work behind the young women, who followed in the rear of the young men. But it was the express desire of Boaz that, instead of exposing herself among strangers, on any adjoining harvest-fields, she should maintain her position behind his reapers as long as there remained any golden crops to reap.

Ver. 22.—**And Naomi said to Ruth her daughter-in-law, It is good, my daughter, that thou shouldest go with his young women, and that thou be not set upon in another field.** Here again we have the archaic repetition, "Ruth her daughter-in-law." Naomi was grateful for Boaz's invitation. Compliance with it would be "good," both immediately and prospectively. In particular, it would save Ruth from running the risk of being rudely handled by utter, and perhaps rough and unprincipled, strangers. "It is good," says Naomi, "that 'they' do not set upon thee in another field." She says "they," but allows the parties she had

in view to remain, dimly visible, in the shade. No doubt, however, she refers to the reapers, binders, gleaners, and other workers who might have to be encountered "in another field." "Meaning," says homely Richard Bernard, "some lewd and lustful men whom Naomi would not so much as make mention of." The verb **יִשָּׁן** is often rendered in our English version *fall upon*. It originally means to *light upon*, whether for good or for evil.

Ver. 23.—**And she kept close by Boaz's young women to glean.** Wright translates thus: "And she kept gleaning along with the maidens of Boaz." But the maidens of Boaz are not represented as gleaning. The historical statement of the verse is to be explained from the hortatory statement of ver. 8: "Keep close to my young women." **Till the end of the barley-harvest and the wheat-harvest.** Ruth's gleanings extended to the close of the wheat-harvest, during which time, no doubt, there would be frequent opportunities for a growing intimacy between the beautiful gleaner and the worthy proprietor. Often too, we may rest assured, would Boaz be a visitor in the humble home of Naomi. "The harvest upon the mountains," says Dr. Robinson, "ripens of course later than in the plains of the Jordan and the sea-coast. The barley-harvest precedes the wheat-harvest by a week or fortnight. On the 4th and 5th of June the people of Hebron were just beginning to gather their wheat; on the 11th and 12th the threshing-floors on the Mount of Olives were in full operation. We had already seen the harvest in the same stage of progress on the plains of Gaza on the 19th of May; while at Jericho, on the 12th of May, the threshing-floors had nearly completed their work" ('*Biblical Researches*,' vol. ii. p. 99). "The Syrian harvest," says Dr. W. M. Thomson, "extends through several months. On the plain of Philistia it commences in April and ends in June; and this not only gives ample time, but it has this great advantage, that the villagers from the mountains can assist the farmers on the plain, since their own crops are not yet ripe. I was struck with this fact while at Mesmia. Several Christians from Bethlehem, who had thus come to reap, spent the evening at my tent, and one of them explained to me the advantages from thus labouring on the plain. He not only received wages for his own and his wife's labour, but his children were permitted to follow after them and glean on their own account, as Boaz allowed Ruth to do in their native village" ('*The Land and the Book*,' p. 544). When it is said, in the last clause of the verse, **and she dwelt with her mother-in-law**, the reference is not to be restricted to the time that succeeded the period of

harvesting. The Vulgate indeed connects the clause with the following verse, and renders it, "After she returned to her mother-in-law," pointing the verb thus *וָרָחַל* instead of *וָרָחַל*. The same translation is given to the verb by Luther and Coverdale. But there is no evidence whatever that Ruth

slept anywhere else than under her mother-in-law's roof. The clause was written, apparently, for the very purpose of bringing out clearly before the mind of the reader her stainless innocence, and sweet simplicity, and never-tiring devotion to her noble mother-in-law.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 18—23.—*Home from the harvest-field.* Evening begins to draw her curtains around the little city of Bethlehem. Let us *look on this picture, and on that*. 1. "On this picture." See Naomi. She is wistfully and longingly looking out for her daughter-in-law's return. So many a matron looks, evening after evening, for the safe return of her husband, her son, her daughter. 2. "And on that." See Ruth toiling slowly along under her "ephah." Her strength is taxed; yet she is thankful for the precious burden. She is picturing to herself the reception she would receive under the lowly roof of her mother-in-law, and ruminating pleasantly on the cheer which both herself and her burden would bring to the anxious heart of the dear old lady. She is happy, though fatigued. Happy are all other bread-winners who, amid the monotony and weariness of daily toil, are cheered with the prospect of ministering to the comfort of wife, mother, grandmother or grandfather, sick sister perhaps, or little children. 3. At length the long-looked-for gleaner arrives. What a glad welcome she receives!—a model welcome, hearty and animating, such as should always be accorded to the good and faithful bread-winner. See with what pride and gratitude she lets slip off her burden into the hands of Naomi. We read, "And her mother-in-law beheld what she had gleaned" (ver. 18). What a *looking*, what a *gazing* there would be. *All that, my daughter? What a wonderful gleaner you must be! How could you gather all that? How good to us has Yahveh been! Here is good food for days to come.* In this matter of gratitude millions should be as conspicuous as Naomi. "Goodness and mercy" have accompanied them all the days of their life. "A table has been spread for them" every day of every year. In looking back over life, for ten, twenty, forty, sixty years, they cannot remember one single day when they had no food to eat. Even in heathen lands "God has not left himself without witness, in that *he does good*, and gives rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling men's hearts with food and gladness" (Acts xiv. 17). Every year is "crowned by him with his goodness" (Ps. lxxv. 11). 4. When Naomi's spirit had become somewhat calmed, and she was about, as we may suppose, to prepare a portion of the gleanings for their simple evening repast, Ruth produced what she had "left over" of her delicious "parched corn." "She brought forth, and gave to her, what she had left over after she was satisfied" (ver. 18). Naomi's astonishment, gratitude, delight would mount up rapidly. She could restrain herself no longer. "Where hast thou gleaned to-day? and where hast thou worked? May he who took notice of thee be blessed!" "She doth here," says Dr. Thomas Fuller, "dart out and ejaculate a prayer, and that at rovers, aiming at no particular mark. '*Blessed be he who took notice of thee.*' Yet, no doubt, was it not in vain; but God made it light on the head of bountiful Boaz, who deserved it." It seems to be in the nature of all great gratitude to ascend to God in praise or prayer. For indeed "every good and perfect gift cometh down from him" (James i. 17). 5. Ruth did not keep her mother-in-law in suspense. "She showed her with whom she had worked; and she said, The name of the man with whom I worked to-day is Boaz" (ver. 19). It augurs well for both daughters and mothers when there are unreserved intercommunications between them. But mothers would require to be confidential if they would have their daughters to be confiding. There will be danger of tragedies in the home if daughters are reticent in reference to the affairs that are of chief concern at once to their own hearts and to the hearts of their parents. The tragedies will be more tragic still if husbands and sons have haunts of which mention cannot be made in the bosom of domestic confidence. "Boaz!" The name would thrill through Naomi. It instantaneously recalled tender memories

of the past; and side by side with these recollections there flitted in before her view visions of the future. But her first utterance was a benison, no longer shot "at rovers." She gratefully lifted aloft her heart, and said, "Blessed of the Lord be he, who has not let go his kindness to the living and to the dead" (ver. 20). He had, it seems, been kind to her and hers long ago. The recollection came fresh to her mind. And now there was abundant and gratifying evidence that he was not "weary of well-doing." He had still the old kind heart, perhaps kinder than ever. With "Boaz" as the theme of conversation, there would not be in all Bethlehem a brighter or happier home that evening than the humble cot of Naomi. The genealogical relationship and former kindnesses of their worthy friend would be fully elucidated (ver. 20), and Ruth would be sure to dwell at length on the invitation she had received to continue in his fields all the harvest through (ver. 21). The evening would glide rapidly on. While they talked, and while, in the intervals of talk, they "mused," the fire within the breast would burn. As it burned, the flame would flicker, now to this side, now to that, but still ever upward toward God. Boaz had said to Ruth—and her heart responded heartily as he said it—that it was under the wings of the God of Israel that she had come to cower and be covered. She had come, he said, to "trust" in Yahveh. She was resolved that she would. Even Naomi would encourage her, and would herself be disposed to revert to the sweet significance of her own name—*Jah is sweet, and deals sweetly*. The hard thoughts which she had been tempted in the time of her anguish to entertain would be sensibly beginning to thaw and melt. And if one could have read the hearts of both, as at length they laid themselves down to rest, perhaps the thoughts of each might have been found to be running in the strain of the words of a great descendant, as he said and sang, "Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased. I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety" (Ps. iv. 6—8). "Tired nature's sweet restorer" would not need to be sedulously wooed, on the part of the gleaner at least; and if Naomi's slumber was not so easily obtained, or so uninterruptedly retained, yet she would "commune with her own heart on her bed, and be still." May we not assume that, when both awoke in the early morning, they were "still with God"?

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 20.—*Kindred and kindness*. When Naomi and Ruth returned to Bethlehem they could scarcely have found friends there, but they found kinsmen. They do not seem, in their circumstances, to have sought assistance from relatives, or even to have brought themselves under the notice of such. Still, Naomi had not lost sight of Elimelech's family connections; and when the name of Boaz was mentioned, she recognised it as the name of one of her husband's nearest kindred.

I. KINDRED IS A DIVINE INSTITUTION. Men have many artificial associations; bonds of sympathy, and of locality, and of common occupation bind them together. But kindred is the Divine, the natural tie.

II. KINDRED IS AT THE FOUNDATION OF SOCIAL AND POLITICAL LIFE. The patriarchal economy was the earliest. The family is the first social unit, out of which springs the tribe, the clan, the nation.

III. KINDRED INVOLVES AN OBLIGATION TO CONSIDERATION AND REGARD. We cannot always cherish feelings of congeniality or of respect with reference to all who are our kindred according to the flesh. But relatives should not lose sight of one another—should not, if it can be avoided, be estranged from one another.

IV. KINDRED MAY, IN CERTAIN CASES, INVOLVE THE DUTY OF PRACTICAL HELP. Christian wisdom must here be called in to the counsels of Christian kindness.

V. KINDRED IS SUGGESTIVE AND EMBLEMATIC OF DIVINE RELATIONS. Apart from human relationship, how could we conceive of God as our Father? of Christ Jesus as our elder Brother? of Christians as our brethren and sisters in a spiritual family?—T.

Ver. 23.—*Harvest-time*. This Book of Ruth is emphatically the book of the husbandman. It pictures the barley-harvest and the wheat-harvest of ancient days.

The primitive manners and usages are interesting, and deserve attentive study. But harvest—as here so vividly brought before us—is full of lessons of a spiritual kind. *E. g.*—

I. HARVEST WITNESSES TO THE ATTRIBUTES OF THE DIVINE CREATOR. To his power and wisdom. To his goodness. To his faithfulness to his promise: "Seed-time and harvest shall not cease."

II. HARVEST IS A SUMMONS TO MAN'S GRATITUDE AND CONFIDENCE.

III. HARVEST IS SUGGESTIVE OF GREAT SPIRITUAL TRUTHS. There is a moral harvest in the history of the human character and of human society. Seed and soil are presumed. Development and growth are evidenced. The law operates: "Whosoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." The fruit is matured and gathered in. The Husbandman—God himself—is interested in the result. To us the result is infinitely important.—T.

Ver. 20.—"Who hath not left off his kindness to the living and the dead." The prayers of the poor for their helpers are very precious. Naomi remembers the former kindnesses that Boaz had shown to the husband of her youth and to her two boys.

I. HERE IS CONTINUITY OF CHARACTER. Some leave off kindness because they meet with experiences of ingratitude and callousness. The once warm deep within them is frozen up by these wintry experiences. But as God continues his mercy through all generations, so those who are followers of God as dear children walk in love; that is, it becomes the spirit and habit of their lives. Boaz had not left off his kindness. Ruth now drinks at the same fountain of considerate care that had refreshed Elimelech.

II. HERE IS THE GOOD WORD OF A MOTHER. It is well when the mother *respects* the man who may become allied in marriage to one who is akin to her. Naomi says to her daughter, "Blessed be he of the Lord." Let those who have become sceptical concerning Christianity ask themselves this: Whether should I like to give my child in marriage to a Christian or an infidel? This practical query would suggest many thoughts tending to renewed faith, and would stifle for ever many superficial doubts.—T.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER III.

Ver. 1.—And Naomi, her mother-in-law, said to her, My daughter, shall not I seek out for thee a rest, that it may be well with thee? When Ruth had nothing more to do on the harvest-fields, where Boaz appeared daily, and was unremittently gracious to her, she may have fallen into a pensive mood. Naomi was quick to note the varying 'nuances' of feeling, and said "My daughter, shall I not seek out for thee a rest?" The expression *rest*, or *resting-place*, though in itself of generic import, was, when used in such circumstances as environed Ruth, quite specific in application, and would be at once understood. It was *a home* to which Naomi pointed, a home for her daughter's heart. In such a home, if warm and pure, there would be repose for the affections. "That it may be well with thee," or, "which shall (or may) be good for thee." Either translation is warrantable and excellent. The latter is the most simple, and is given by Carpzov and Rosenmüller; but the former is in accordance with a frequent idiomatic use of the expression, in which there is a change from the *relative in result* to the *relative in*

aim, so that רָחֵם יִיָּאֵל is equivalent to רָחֵם לְךָ (see Deut. iv. 40; vi. 3, 18; x. 11, 25, 28). Naomi did not distinguish between *rests* that would be 'good,' and other *rests* which would not be 'good.' Nor did she moralise on the idea of a *rest*, and affirm that it would be 'good' for her widowed daughter-in-law. She assumed that every true *rest* was 'good,' and, on the basis of that assumption, she sought out one for her devoted Ruth. Hence the superiority of the rendering that expresses *aim* to that which expresses the mere prediction of *result*.

Ver. 2.—And now is not Boaz, with whose young women thou wast, our relative? Naomi opens her case. She had been studying Boaz all through the harvest season. She had been studying Ruth too. She saw unmistakable evidence of mutual responsiveness and attachment. And now she had a matured scheme in her head. Hence she brings up Boaz's name at once, and says, "Is he not our relative?" כֹּהֵן, an abstract term used concretely, meaning literally "acquaintance," but here "relative," or "kinsman" (see ch. ii. 1). Lo, he is

winnowing barley on the threshing-floor to-night. Literally, "Lo, he is winnowing the threshing-floor of barley." The Hebrews could idiomatically speak of "the threshing-floor of barley," meaning "the threshing-floor-ful of barley." The barley lay heaped up in Boaz's threshing-floor, and he was engaged in winnowing it. He threw up against the wind the mingled mass that was on his floor, after the stalks had been carefully trodden or beaten. "Not far," says Dr. Horatio Hackett, "from the site of ancient Corinth, I passed a heap of grain, which some labourers were employed in winnowing. They used for throwing up the mingled wheat and chaff a three-pronged wooden fork, having a handle three or four feet long" ('Illustrations,' p. 106). "The winnowing," says Dr. Kitto, "was performed by throwing up the grain with a fork against the wind, by which the chaff and broken straw were dispersed, and the grain fell to the ground. The grain was afterwards passed through a sieve to separate the morsels of earth and other impurities, and it then underwent a final purification by being tossed up with wooden scoops, or short-handed shovels, such as we see sculptured on the monuments of Egypt" ('Illustrations,' *in loc.*, p. 40). In some of the Egyptian sculptures the winnowers are represented as having scoops in both hands. תַּלְלִי, *to-night* (Scotticé, "*the night*"). The agriculturist in Palestine and the surrounding districts would often carry on his winnowing operations after sunset, taking advantage of the evening breeze that then blows. The Chaldee Targumist makes express reference to this breeze, explaining the word *to-night* as meaning *in the wind which blows by night*.

Ver. 3. — **So then wash thyself, and anoint thyself, and dress thyself.** This latter phrase is in the original, "and put thy garments on thee." The verb **תַּלְלִי**, with its final yod, was the archaic form of the second person feminine, though still much cut down and contracted from its oldest form. See Raabe's 'Zurückführung,' and note the conduct of the verb, in its relation to the pronominal suffixes, when these are affixed. **And go down to the threshing-floor.** The town of Bethlehem lay on the summit of "the narrow ridge of a long gray hill" (Stanley's 'Sinai and Palestine,' p. 163), while the corn-fields, that gave the fortified place its name of *Bread-town*, stretched out expandingly in the valleys below. Dr. Robinson says, "We ascended gradually toward Bethlehem around the broad head of a valley running N.E. to join that under Mâr Elyâs. The town lies on the E. and

N.E. slope of a long ridge; another deep valley, Wady Ta'âmirah, being on the south side, which passes down north of the Frank Mountain toward the Dead Sea, receiving the valley under Mâr Elyâs not far below. Toward the west the hill is higher than the village, and then sinks down very gradually toward Wady Ahmed" ('Biblical Researches,' vol. ii. p. 158). **Let not your presence be known to the man before he has finished eating and drinking.** It would have been imprudent and impolitic to have discovered her presence while his servants and himself were busied in operations which required to be actively prosecuted while the breeze was favourable, and the light of the moon serviceable. Ruth was to wait till the servants, having finished their work and their repast, had retired to their respective homes. The master, as Naomi knew, would remain gratefully and joyfully on the spot, to keep watch in the midst of his cereal treasures, and under the still magnificence of the broad canopy of heaven. Speaking of Hebron, Dr. Robinson says, "Here we needed no guard around our tent. The owners of the crops came every night and slept upon their threshing-floors to guard them, and this we had found to be universal in all the region of Gaza. We were in the midst of scenes precisely like those of the Book of Ruth, when Boaz winnowed barley in his threshing-floor, and laid himself down at night to guard the heap of corn" ('Biblical Researches,' vol. ii. p. 446). Boaz's heart, when all was quiet around him, would be full of calm and comfort. He would pace about his well-heaped threshing-floor contentedly, contemplatively; and, as he paced, and thought, and adored, the figure of the beautiful and industrious gleaner might persist in coming in within the field of meditation. It might linger there, and be gladly allowed to linger.

Ver. 4. — **And let it be, when he lies down, that thou take note of the place where he lies; and go, and uncover the parts about his feet, and lay thee down; and he shall declare to thee what thou shalt do.** The denominative word **תַּלְלִי**—freely rendered in King James's version "his feet"—we have rendered "the parts about his feet." It is the exact opposite of **תַּלְלִי**, which never means "his head," but is always translated correctly either "his pillows" or "his bolster." It denotes "the supports on which the head was laid in lying;" and **תַּלְלִי**, having reference to members of the body which do not need such supports as the head, simply means "the places occupied by the feet." Naomi ventured on a bold expedient to bring speedy 'rest' to her daughter-in-law. But we

assume that, with unmistakable feminine intuition, she saw, on the one hand, that Boaz was already deeply attached to Ruth, and, on the other, that Ruth reciprocated his attachment with pure intensity. Most probably we should also assume that she detected in Boaz a peculiar diffidence that caused him to shrink from making decisive advances in the way of declaring his affection. He had, however, unconsciously revealed himself, and made it clear to Naomi that he wished to divulge in words the depth of his honourable feelings. But again and again, as we may suppose, his sensitiveness overcame his resolutions. Hence Naomi's scheme to bring him to the point of declaration. It would have been reprehensible in the extreme had she not been absolutely certain of his wishes, on the one hand, and of his perfect honour and uncontaminable purity on the other. And even with that qualification, the scheme would have been imprudent and improper, and utterly unfeminine, had it not been the case that, in virtue of an ancient and much-prized Hebrew law, Ruth was entitled to call upon her nearest of kin to fulfil the various duties of a responsible kinsman. Still, notwithstanding the existence of this law, we may rest assured that the sensitive gleaner would never have summoned up courage to ask Boaz to discharge to her the duties of kinship, unless she had been sure that the thrills that vibrated within her own heart were responsive to subtle touches, on his part, of spirit with spirit.

Ver. 5.—*And she said, All that thou sayest I will do.* There is no need for adopting into the text the K'ri "to me," after the expression "All that thou sayest." It is a mere "tittle," indeed, whether we omit or insert the pronoun; yet it was not found in the manuscripts that lay before the Septuagint and Vulgate translators.

Vers. 6, 7.—*And she went down to the threshing-floor, and did according to all that her mother-in-law had enjoined. And Boaz ate and drank, and his heart was comfortable; and he went to lie down at the end of the heap; and she came softly, and uncovered the parts about his feet, and laid herself down.* The translation in King James's version, "and his heart was merry," is perhaps stronger than there is any occasion for. The word rendered "was merry,"—viz., *צָחַק*—is literally "was good." The Septuagint word is *ἡγαθύνθη*. After the labours of the evening, Boaz had a relish for his simple repast. It was good to him. Hence he ate and drank to his heart's content, enjoying with grateful spirit the bounties of a gracious Providence. By and by he retired to rest, amid visions perchance of a brightened home, which just helped to reflect on his conscious-

ness a stronger resolution than he had ever formed before to make known his affection. At length he slept. The Syriac translator adds interpretatively, "in a sweet sleep on the floor." Ruth then stepped cautiously forth to play her delicate part. She stole softly to the sheltered spot where he lay. She gently uncovered the margin of the cloak, which lay over the place where his feet were laid. She laid herself down noiselessly. The Arabic translator adds, "and slept beside him"—a most unhappy interpretation. Nothing but sin would be so far away as sleep from the eyes, and mind, and heart of the anxious suitor.

Ver. 8.—*And it came to pass at midnight that the man started in a fright; and he bent himself over, and lo, a woman was lying at his feet.* He had awaked, and, feeling something soft and warm at his feet, he was startled and affrighted. What could it be? In a moment or two he recovered his self-possession, and bending himself up and over, or "*crooking* himself," to see and to feel, lo, a woman was lying at his feet. The Chaldee Targumist tumbles into a ludicrous bathos of taste when endeavouring to emphasise the startle and shiver which Boaz experienced. He says, "He trembled, and his flesh became soft as a turnip from the agitation." How could the most peddling and paltering of Rabbis succeed in betraying himself into such a laughable puerility and absurdity? The explanation, though of course it is not the least atom of justification, lies in the fact that the Chaldee word for "turnip" is *תפול*, while the verb that denotes "he bent himself" is the niph'al of *תפל*. The use of the expression "the man," in this and several of the adjoining verses, is apt to grate a little upon English ears. Let us explain and vindicate the term as we may, the grating is still felt. No matter though we know that "the rank is but the guinea stamp," the grating is felt inevitably. It is a result of that peculiar growth in living language that splits generic terms into such as are specific or semi-specific. We have *gentleman* as well as *man*, and embarrassment is not infrequently the result of our linguistic wealth. In the verse before us, and in some of those that go before, we should be disposed, in our English idiom, to employ the proper name: "And it came to pass at midnight that 'Boaz' started in a fright."

Ver. 9.—*And he said, Who art thou? And she said, I am Ruth, thy handmaid; and thou hast spread thy wings over thy handmaid, for thou art kinsman.* The Syriac translator spoils the question of Boaz by metamorphosing it from "Who art thou?" into "What is thy message?" Tremulous would be the voice of Ruth as she replied,

"I am Ruth, thy handmaid." What she said in continuance has been very generally, and by Driver, among others ('Hebrew Tenses,' p. 135), misapprehended. Not by Raabe, however. It has been regarded as a petition presented to Boaz—"Spread thy wings (or, *thy wing*) over thy handmaid, for thou art kinsman." The literal translation, however, and far the more delicate idea, as also far the more effective representation, is, "And thou hast spread thy wings over thy handmaid, for thou art kinsman." Ruth explains her position under Boaz's coverlet as if it were his own deliberate act. Such is her felicitous way of putting the case. It is as if she had said, "The position in which thy handmaid actually is exhibits the true relation in which thou standest to thy handmaid. She is under thy wings. Thou hast benignantly spread them over her, for thou art kinsman." The Masorites have correctly regarded רַחֵם as a *scriptio defectiva* for the dual of the noun, and hence have punctuated it רַחֵם, "thy wings." The majority of interpreters, however, have assumed that the word is singular, and have hence translated it as if it had been punctuated רַחֵם. The dual reading is to be preferred. Boaz himself had represented Ruth as having come trustfully under the wings of Yahveh (see ch. ii. 12). She accepted the representation. It was beautifully true. But, as she was well aware that God often works through human agency, she now recognised the Divine hand in the kindness of Boaz. "*Thou hast spread thy wings over thine handmaid.*" She was under his wings because she had come under the wings of Yahveh. She felt like a little timid chicken; but she had found a refuge. It is the wings of tender, gentle, sheltering care that are referred to. There is only indirect allusion to the typical coverlet under which she lay. For thou art kinsman (see ch. ii. 20). The native modesty of Ruth led her to account for her position by a reference to the law of kinship. She had rights, and she stood upon them. She conceived that Boaz had correlative duties to discharge; but we may be sure that she would never have made the least reference to her rights, or to the correlative duties which she regarded as devolving on Boaz, had she not known that his heart was already hers.

Ver. 10.—And he said, Blessed be thou of Yahveh, my daughter; thou hast made thy latter kindness better than the former, in not going after any young man, whether poor or rich. This verse is full of satisfactory evidence that Naomi was perfectly right in conjecturing that Boaz, deep in love, was restrained only by diffidence from formally declaring himself. It shows us too that the chief ground of his diffidence was his age.

RUTH.

He had been an acquaintance, and the equal in years, of Ruth's father-in-law, Elimelech, and the impression had got hold on him that the handsome young widow might feel repugnance to his suit. Hence, instead of being in the least degree offended by the steps she had taken, he was relieved, and felt full of gratification on the one hand, and of gratitude on the other. Blessed be thou of Yahveh. Literally, "to Yahveh," i. e. "in relation to Yahveh" (see ch. ii. 20). My daughter. His relative elderliness was in his mind. Thou hast made thy latter kindness better than the former. Michaelis has seized the true meaning of these words: "The kindness which thou art showing to thy husband, now that he is gone, is still greater than what thou didst show to him while he lived." Her employment of the word "kinsman," or *goel*, was evidence to Boaz that she was thinking of the respect which she owed to her husband's memory. Her concern in discharging that duty of 'piety' struck the heart of Boaz; and all the more as, in his opinion, she might easily have found open doors, had she wished for them, in quarters where there was no connection of kinship with her deceased husband. "She did not go after any young man, whether poor or rich." She preferred, above all such, her first husband's elderly "kinsman." In the original the construction is peculiar—"in not going after the young men, whether a poor one or a rich one." He does not simply mean that she was free from vagrant courses and desires. Her character lay, to his eye, on a far higher level. His meaning is that she deliberately refrained from "thinking of any young man." The plural "young men," is to be accounted for on the principle that when an alternate is assumed or postulated, there is, in actual contemplation, a plurality of individuals.

Ver. 11.—And now, my daughter, fear not: all that thou sayest I shall do to thee, for it is on all hands known in the gate of my people that thou art a truly capable woman. The word אִשָּׁה in the expression אִשָּׁה אֲמִי is of many-sided import, and has no synonym in English, German, Latin, or Greek. But every side of its import brings into view one or other or more of such affiliated ideas as *strength, force, forces, capability*—whether mental and moral only, or also financial; *competency, substantiality, ability, bravery*. All who had taken notice of Ruth perceived that she was mentally and morally, as well as physically, a *substantial and capable woman*. She was possessed of *force*, both of mind and character. She was, in the New England sense of the expression, a *woman of "faculty."* She was *full of resources*, and thus adequate to the

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position which, as Boaz's wife, she would be required to fill. There was no levity about her, "no nonsense." She was earnest, industrious, virtuous, strenuous, brave. There was much of the *heroine* in her character, and thus the expression connects itself with the masculine application of the distinctive and many-sided word, "a mighty man of valour." The expression אִישׁ חָסִיד occurs in Prov. xii. 4, where, in King James's version, it is, as here and in Prov. xxxi. 10, translated "a virtuous woman"—"a virtuous woman is a crown to her husband." But it is not so much to *moral virtue* that there is a reference as to that general capacity which consists in "large discourse, looking before and after" ('Hamlet,' iv. 4). Compare the masculine expression אִישׁ חָסִיד in Exod. xviii. 21, 25, rendered, in King James's version, "able men," and meaning *capable or substantial men*, who, however, as we learn from the additional characteristics that are specified, were to be likewise conspicuous for high moral worth. In Prov. xxxi. 10 there is the same reference to *general capacity*, as is evidenced by the graphic representation that follows—a representation that by no means exhausts itself in the idea of *moral virtue*. Ibn Ezra takes the whole soul out of the expression when he interprets it, both here and in Proverbs, as meaning "a woman possessed of riches." When Boaz says, "All that thou sayest I will do to thee," he means, "All that thou hast so winsomely and yet so modestly referred to in what thou didst say, I am prepared to do to thee." There was only one obstacle in the way, and that of a somewhat technical description. If that should be honourably surmounted, nothing would be more agreeable to Boaz's heart than to get nearer to Ruth. "For," said he, "it is on all hands known in the gate of my people that," &c. Literally the phrase is, "for all the gate of my people know," a strangely inverted but picturesque mode of expression. It was not "the gate of the people," but "the people of the gate," that knew.

Ver. 12.—And now it is the case of a truth that while I am a kinsman, there is yet a kinsman nearer than I. Or the rendering might with greater brevity be given thus: And now of a truth I am a kinsman; and yet there is a kinsman nearer than I. The survivals of a very ancient style of elaborately-detailed composition are here preserved. The archaism, however, was not quite appreciated by the Masorites, who, in accordance with the spirit of the age in which they flourished, took but little note of the philological development, historical and prehistorical, of the language they were handling. Hence they suppressed the אִישׁ in

K'ri, though faithfully preserving it in C'tib. The particles, standing up and semi-isolated, palaeolithic-wise, might be accounted for in some such way as is shown in the following paraphrase: "And now (I declare) 'that' of a truth (it is the case) 'that if' (I declare the whole truth) I (am) a kinsman, and also there is a kinsman nearer than I." Boaz was of that strictly honourable cast of mind that he could not for a moment entertain any project that might amount to a disregard of the rights of others, even although these rights should fly violently in the teeth of his own personal desires.

Ver. 13.—Abide here to-night; and it shall come to pass in the morning, if he will act to thee the part of a kinsman, well; he shall act the kinsman's part: and if it please him not to act to thee the kinsman's part, then sure as Yahveh is alive, I will act to thee the kinsman's part. Lie still till the morning. Love is quick-witted. Boaz's plan of operations would formulate itself on the spur of the moment; but the remainder of the night would doubtless be spent in maturing the details of procedure. The aim would be to secure, as far as honour would permit, the much-wished-for prize. There would be, moreover, we need not doubt, much conversation between them, and mutual consultation, and arrangement. A large letter, a *majuscula*, occurs in the first word of the verse—וְיָ—which the smaller Masora ascribes to the Oriental or Babylonian textualists. It had, no doubt, been at first either a merely accidental, or a finically capricious, enlargement; but, being found, mysteries had to be ex-cogitated to account for it;—all mere rubbish. "To-night" is a perfect translation of לַיְלָה, for the *to* is simply the common definite article in one of its peculiar forms, perhaps peculiarly crushed and defaced (see note on ch. iii. 2).

Ver. 14.—And she lay at the place of his feet until morning: and she arose ere yet a man could distinguish his neighbour. In the original it is "the places of his feet" (see ver. 4). Time would rapidly fly past. Sleep there would be none to either the one or the other. In mutual modesty they guarded each other's honour. Thoughts and feelings, narratives and projects, would be freely interchanged. Their mutual understanding would become complete. At length there began to be the first faint tinge of paleness streaking into the dark. Ruth arose, and prepared to depart. It is added, For he had said,—or, more literally, "And he had said,"—Let it not be known that 'the' woman came to the threshing-floor. This has been to critics a puzzling clause. The conjunction in the foreground, a mere

copulative, has occasioned difficulty. It is thoroughly Hebraistic. But of course it does not here introduce to notice something merely added to what goes before, of the nature of a parting injunction or request addressed to Ruth. The articulated phrase "*the woman*," as distinguished from "*a woman*," the expression in King James's version, renders such an interpretation impossible. The Targumist explains thus: "and he said to *his young men*." But the whole tenor of the preceding narrative proceeds on the assumption that there were no servants on the premises or at hand. Other Rabbis, and after them Luther and Coverdale, interpret thus: "and he said in *his heart*," or, "and he thought." Unnatural. The difficulty is to be credited, or debited, to simplicity of composition, and the habit of just adding thing to thing aggregatively, instead of interweaving them into a complex unity. In the course of their many interchanges of thought and feeling, Boaz had expressed a desire, both for Ruth's sake and for his own, that it should not be known that she had come by night to the threshing-floor. The narrator, instead of introducing this expression of desire in the way in which it would directly fall from the lips of Boaz, "Let it not be known that *thou* didst come," gives it in the indirect form of speech, the *oratio obliqua*, as his own statement of the case. It is as if he had introduced a parenthesis or added a note in the margin. The ἀναξ λεγόμενον בִּרְחָב—instead of בִּרְחָב—was most probably not a later form, as Bertheau supposes, but an older Hebrew form that had died out of use long before the days of the Masorites.

Ver. 15.—And he said, Allow me the wrapper which is upon thee, and hold on by it; and she held on by it; and he measured six measures of barley; and he put it on her, and went to the city. The expression "Allow me," literally, "Give (me)," was a current phrase of courtesy. The verb employed—נָתַן—was common Semitic property, ere yet the mother-tongue was subdivided into Hebrew, Syriac, Chaldean, Arabic. The wrapper which is upon thee. The word for *wrapper* occurs nowhere else except in Isa. iii. 22, where it is translated, in King James's version "wimple." Here it is rendered "vail," and, in the margin, "sheet or apron,"—all of them unhappy translations. So is the rendering of the Targumist, נָתַן, i. e. *sudarium*, or "napkin." N. G. Schröder discusses the word at great length in his masterly 'Commentarius Philologicus-Criticus de Vestitu Mulierum Hebræarum,' pp. 247—277. He would render it *pallium* or *palla*. In consequence of national peculiarities in articles of dress, especially in

ancient times, it is best to avoid a specific, and to employ a generic translation. When Boaz said, "Give me the wrapper," he did not ask that it should be handed to him. He had already put his hand upon it, and was engaged in hollowing out a scoop or cavity. Hence he said, on the one hand, "Allow me," and, on the other, "Hold on by it." And he measured six measures of barley. The particular measure referred to is unspecified. It is not only mere dream on the part of the Targumist, but it is dream involving almost sheer impossibility, that the measures were *seahs*, i. e. two ephahs. The Targumist had to bolster up his dream by adding another, viz., that Ruth got miraculously strength to carry the load. Load, indeed, there undoubtedly was; and no doubt it would be as great as she could conveniently carry. And likewise, in accordance with the primitive simplicity of manners, the magnitude of the burden would be demonstration to Naomi of Boaz's satisfaction with the "*measures*" which, in full motherliness of spirit, she had planned. And he went to the city. The Vulgate and Syriac versions, as also Castellio, Coverdale, and various other translators, but not Luther, have assumed that we should read מָצָא, "and she went," instead of נָתַן, "and he went." So too Wright. But there seems to be no good reason for making the change. If there had been no division into verses, then the departure of both Boaz and Ruth on their respective routes, or in their respective order of sequence, would have been recorded close together: "and 'he' went to the city, and 'she' went to her mother-in-law"—each, let us bear in mind, with the heart elate.

Ver. 16.—And she went to her mother-in-law. And she said, Who art thou, my daughter? And she narrated to her all that the man had done to her. The question, "Who art thou, my daughter?" is not put by Naomi, as Drusius supposes, because it was still so dusk that she could not properly distinguish Ruth. The address, "My daughter," shows that she had no difficulty in determining who the visitor was. But there is *something arch* intended. "Art thou Boaz's betrothed?" Michaelis translates, "What art thou?" Unwarrantably as regards the letter, but correctly as regards the spirit of the interrogatory.

Ver. 17.—And she said, These six measures of barley he gave to me; for he said, Thou must not go empty to thy mother-in-law. The C'tib omission of "to me" after "for he said" is most likely to be the original reading. A fastidious Rabbi would rather originate this insertion than the omission.

Ver. 18.—And she said, Sit still, my daughter, till that thou know how the affair

will fall out, for the man will not rest unless he complete the affair to-day. In saying, "Sit still, my daughter," it is as if Naomi had said, "There is no occasion for restless anxiety. Let your heart be at ease till that thou know how the affair will fall

out." In the Hebrew the noun is without the article. But in English it must be supplied, unless a plural be employed—"how 'things' will fall out." רַחֵם, *thing*, i. e. *think*. Compare the corresponding relation between the German *sache* and *sagen*.

HOMILETICS.

Ch. iii.—*Naomi's maternal solicitude.* This is one of those paragraphs of Scripture which require delicate handling, but which, for that very reason, are full of suggestiveness that comes home to the bosom. Under strange, old-fashioned forms of things there was often much real virtue and true nobility of character. 1. It may be regarded as certain that while the harvest lasted Boaz and Ruth would be coming daily into contact with each other. 2. It may likewise be assumed as certain that their minds would from day to day grow into one another, in interest and esteem. As intimacy increased, it would reveal, on either side, points of character that were fitted to evoke admiration and sincere respect. 3. It is reasonable to suppose that Naomi's humble home in Bethlehem would be again and again visited by Boaz. There would be various attractions. Naomi herself, as an old and now a far-travelled friend, would be able to tell much that would be interesting to the kinsman of Elimelech. 4. The Palestinian harvest season would that year, as well as on other years, be a lively time. The harvest-home, in particular, would be a joy and a rural triumph. It may well be so in all countries. The golden grain is more precious by far than grains of gold. It is emphatically the "staff" on which terrestrial life has to lean. One of the chief uses of gold is to buy from the agriculturist, directly or circuitously, for the use of those who live in towns and cities, the superfluity of cereals raised in the harvest-fields. Harvesting operations are thus always interesting and stirring. Ruth would feel an interest; and, in consequence of the hearty sympathy and favour of Boaz, her whole nature would be stirred. 5. But it is far from being improbable that when the gleaning season was ended, so that Ruth had to exchange out-of-door for indoor activities, she may have acquired, to the eye of her solicitous mother-in-law, an unusually pensive appearance. 6. Naomi would no doubt make Ruth a constant study. Every mother, every father, should make every individual child in the family circle an individual study. It is not every child, it is not every young man, or young woman, whose whole heart can be read off at a sitting. Many a mind is many-volumed. Naomi did her best day by day to understand her devoted and deeply affectionate daughter-in-law, and seems to have felt increasingly solicitous as she noticed her unwonted thoughtfulness and reticence. 7. Then we must bear in mind that in such a state of society as then prevailed in Bethlehem and Judah, there must have been extremely little scope for female energy and industry in business directions. Happily in our time there is, so far as Great Britain is concerned, considerable interest taken by philanthropic minds in the subject of female education, literary and technical. There are, moreover, even already many spheres in which females, not otherwise provided for, can find, in affairs congenial to their tastes and idiosyncrasies, remuneration and employment. In many government offices, and in other spheres of activity, females now occupy important positions. Not only do they excel in works of taste: whatever requires careful attention, combined with delicate manipulation, can be intrusted to their hands. There is still, it is true, much to be done to promote the employment and independence of single females; but a beginning has been made, and a point or two beyond that beginning have been reached. In the time and sphere of Naomi, however, there were no open doors of this kind. And hence, when she was looking out for the settlement of her daughter-in-law, she naturally thought only of a 'rest' for her in a home of her own. In reference to such a 'rest,' it is the duty of all mothers and mothers-in-law to be solicitous, though never obtrusive, in behalf of their children. Advice may be tendered, caution may be suggested; but there must be true sympathy on the one hand, and true delicacy of feeling on the other.

To turn now more particularly to Boaz—1. It is reasonable to suppose that Naomi

had noticed that he looked on Ruth with longing eyes. 2. It is also reasonable to suppose that, from some cause or other, Boaz felt himself under an unconquerable spell of reticence. The cause seems to be revealed in his use again and again of the fatherly expression, *My daughter*, as applied to Ruth. He was evidently well advanced in years. This seems to have been the soil on which his insuperable diffidence grew. How to get this diffidence plucked up by the roots was the problem which the solicitous Naomi set herself to solve. 3. There was only one way, as it appeared to her, in which Boaz's mind could be set free from the spell which put a seal on his lips. That was to bring Ruth into such relationship to him that he would learn her true sentiments on the one hand, and feel put upon his honour on the other. Naomi, to effect this consummation, took advantage of a time-honoured custom, which had come down from very remote and primitive times, and was still in full force among the Hebrews. She thought of *the Levirate law*. This was a law that gave a widow, if an heiress, the right to claim, from the nearest of kin to her deceased husband, conjugal assistance in the management of her estate. The nearest of kin, if thus appealed to for the purpose indicated, had a right to refuse the widow's claim, provided he was willing to submit to certain indignities and unpleasant formalities, such as being stripped of one of his shoes, and then twitted and hooted as *Barefoot* (Deut. xxv. 6—10). But if it should happen to be the case that his feelings were the reverse of repugnance, then the act of compliance would be at once the highest meed of respect which could be paid to the memory of the deceased, and the greatest gratification that could be enjoyed by the living. In the case of Ruth and Boaz, two just conclusions had been arrived at by Naomi. One had reference to Ruth, and was to the effect that, while it would be impossible for her to initiate action that might be regarded as terminating on herself, it would yet be both possible for and becoming in her to undertake the initiation of action that had for its aim what was due to the name and honour of her deceased husband. The other had reference to Boaz, and was to the effect that his diffidence, otherwise unconquerable, would be conquered if he were put upon his honour, and saw his way clear to discharge a duty to a deceased kinsman. 4. We must, in addition, suppose that Naomi, in making arrangement for the midnight interview, had unfaltering confidence in the incorruptible innocence of Ruth, and in the incontaminable purity of Boaz. 5. We are likewise entitled to assume that the method of claiming a kinsman's interposition, which she laid down for her daughter-in-law's guidance, was no gratuitous invention of her own. It is natural to regard it as having been the normal and accredited formula of procedure that was in use in "society," for the initiation of such measures as were requisite in the application of the Levirate law. 6. It is on this assumption alone that we can account for the fact that no apology was made by Ruth, and that no surprise was expressed by Boaz. Instead of surprise, there was only devout admiration of Ruth's entire demeanour in relation to her deceased husband. He said, "Blessed be thou of the Lord, my daughter; thou hast made thy latter kindness better than the former, in not going after any young man, whether poor or rich." It is her kindness to the deceased, not her kindness to himself, of which he speaks. The kindness she was showing after her husband's decease was, in Boaz's estimation, still greater than the kindness she had showed him, or had been able to show him, during his life. A woman, so attractive and so capable as she, might have readily found among the young men many open doors to rest, and ease, and affluence. But she did not for one moment wish to avail herself of any of these openings. She wished to do honour to the name and memory of her lamented Machlon, more especially in her capacity as the prospective heiress of his property. 7. We may be sure, however, that Naomi would never have availed herself of the customs that had got fixed by "use and wont" in relation to the Levirate law, unless she had been certain that it would be in accordance with the deepest desires of both her friends that they should get together in life.

In the light of these remarks we may now re-read the entire chapter, interposing, as we go along the successive verses, whatever expository or practical remark may seem to be called for.

Ver. 1.—There is something radically wrong in every home which is not a "rest" to its inmates; and life without a home is emphatically a life of unrest.

Vers. 2—4.—Naomi's solicitude for her devoted daughter-in-law is beautiful and motherly. But the form into which it ran and took shape can never recur in the midst of the culture and customs of European society. Even the method of winnowing the golden grain of the harvest-field, as referred to in ver. 2, is antique and obsolete. So, too, is the method which Boaz adopted to watch over his cereal treasures. He constituted himself his own watchman and policeman.

Ver. 5.—Ruth's confidence in Naomi's kindness and wisdom is noteworthy. It was no upstart prepossession and blindfold feeling. Naomi had earned it by a long-continued course of prudence and sympathy. Boaz too had earned a corresponding confidence, and hence she did not hesitate to intrust herself to his honour. She felt that she was safe.

Vers. 6, 7.—The expression "his heart was merry" just means that he felt physically comfortable, and ready for quiet and sound repose.

Ver. 8.—When it is said that "the man was afraid, and turned himself," the meaning of the latter clause, as it stands in King James's version, would require some modification. The idea is not that Boaz *turned from one side to another*. It is that, having started in a fright, in consequence of the presence, to his indistinct consciousness, of something unusual about his feet, he raised himself up and bent forward to feel what it was.

Ver. 9.—His touch had satisfied him that it was a woman who was at his feet. Who was she? Ruth at once declared herself, no doubt in accents of sweet modesty. The statement with which she follows up the declaration of herself is variously interpreted. In King James's version there are two departures from literality. 1. The word *skirt* is not a literal rendering of the Hebrew term. *Wings* is the proper translation. 2. The entreaty *Spread therefore* is also a departure from literality. The verb is not in the *imperative*, but in the *affirmative*—*And thou hast spread*. It is Ruth's own interpretation of the position of affairs. She had come to Judæa to take shelter *under the wings of Jehovah*; and Boaz had, on his part, in harmony with the heavenly kindness of Jehovah, spread over her his wings of terrestrial kindness. She thus does not speak at all of Boaz's *skirt*, or *skirts*. There was beautiful delicacy in her representation. She did not need to enter into particular details. Her position, viewed in the light of custom, explained the whole case.

Vers. 10, 11.—"And now, my daughter, fear not"—give not thyself any anxious concern in reference to the result. "All the people in the gate of my city know that thou art a *virtuous woman*." Yes, she *was* virtuous; and yet she was much more. She was endowed with all the *capabilities* which fitted her for the position she was willing to occupy (see the *Exposition*).

Ver. 12.—Note the highly honourable character of Boaz. There was one nearer in kinship to Ruth than himself. This person, therefore, must receive the first offer. Had the case come before Boaz as simply one of personal affection, he would in all probability have made no reference to the nearer kinsman. But as it had come before him in its relation to the deceased, and connected itself with Ruth because of her relation to the deceased, he felt that he must act in strictest honour. There were rights of property at stake, as well as affections of the heart, and Boaz could be no party to deprive any one of such rights. Still we need not doubt that his heart thrilled at the thought that the rights involved would not prove an insurmountable barrier between himself and Ruth.

Ver. 13.—Boaz's mind still runs on the lines of a kinsman's duty. There was hence something that might be thrust in between the desires of his heart and the object toward whom they trembled.

Ver. 14.—Boaz was desirous to guard the fair name and fame of Ruth, as well as to keep untarnished his own unsullied reputation.

Ver. 15.—He wished that Naomi might have some tangible evidence of his satisfaction.

Ver. 16.—The question *Who art thou?* sprang from Naomi's hope that the entire scheme would issue in success.

Ver. 17.—The present was, in one point of view, inconsiderable; but, in another point of view, it was a most suitable gift from one who desired indeed to show sym-

pathy, gratitude, and kindness, but who did not wish, at that stage of the affair, to raise unconditioned expectation which might never be realised.

Ver. 18.—Naomi, as it were, said to Ruth and to her own heart, *Peace, peace. All will be well. All is well. The hand of the Almighty is dealing "sweetly," not "bitterly," with all the parties concerned.*

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 1.—*Marriage, a woman's rest.* If Ruth was unselfish, so also was Naomi. The mother-in-law acted towards the young Moabitess as if she had been her own daughter. In seeking a husband for her daughter-in-law Naomi followed the customs of her country and her age. (Our English custom is intermediate between the French custom, according to which the husband is provided by the negotiations of the parents, and the American custom, which leaves daughters to select for themselves.) The case before us was not an ordinary one. For whilst marriage was almost universally looked forward to by Hebrew youths and maidens, there were very special reasons why Naomi should seek a husband for Ruth. As is implied in the text, Naomi desired that her daughter-in-law might find in marriage with Boaz—

I. A HOME, which should be a rest from her wanderings.

II. A PROVISION, which should deliver her from the misery and the temptations of poverty.

III. HAPPINESS, which should compensate her for the sorrows of her widowhood.

IV. PIOUS COMPANIONSHIP, which should be a relief from long friendlessness.

Lessons:—1. Parents should take thought for their children, and not leave them to choose companions and friends and life-associates by chance. Nothing could be more disastrous than such neglect and thoughtlessness. 2. Marriage should be thought of with deliberation and prayer, both by the young, and by their parents or natural guardians. 3. Those who have found rest and prosperity in marriage should not omit the duty of gratitude and praise for the care and direction of Divine providence.—T.

Ver. 2.—*Diligence in business.* Boaz is an example of a thorough man of business. He was wont himself to see to it that the land was well tilled and well reaped. He was personally acquainted with the labourers. He even noticed the gleaners. He watched the reaping. He superintended the winnowing. He slept on the winnowing-floor, to protect his corn from the designs of robbers.

I. A RELIGIOUS MAN IS BOUND TO ATTEND TO THE CALLING HE EXERCISES. Whether a landowner, a farmer, a merchant, a tradesman, or a professional man, he ought to give his attention to his occupation, and not to neglect his own business to be a meddler in that of others. His business is thus more likely to prosper, and his example to younger men will be influential and beneficial.

II. AN EMPLOYER OF LABOUR IS BOUND TO STUDY THE WELFARE OF HIS SERVANTS. The present state of society is very different from that in the time of Boaz. Society is less patriarchal, and more democratic. But there is still room, both in the household and in commercial and agricultural and manufacturing life, for the exercise of wise and kindly supervision over those who are employed to labour.

III. DILIGENCE IN BUSINESS PROCURES A MAN MANY ADVANTAGES. It is foolish to despise wealth, though it is easy to over-estimate it. From the narrative it is clear that the wealth of Boaz enabled him to secure a charming and virtuous wife, gave him great consideration amongst his neighbours and fellow-townsmen. If a man neglects the opportunity of acquiring property in order to pursue learning, or to do good, he deserves respect; but if from sloth and heedlessness, he is despised. Wealth is good if it be used for good purposes—for the education of children, for the encouragement of learning and virtue, for the well-being of the people at large.—T.

Vers. 5, 6.—*Filial obedience.* Ruth was not Naomi's daughter, yet she acted, and with good reason and great propriety, as though she had been such. What holds good, therefore, of the relationship described in this book holds good, *a fortiori*, of the relation between parents and children. In modern society the bonds of parental

discipline are, especially among the working class, lamentably relaxed. Christian people should, in the interests alike of patriotism and religion, do all they can to strengthen these bonds. The text affords us a beautiful example of filial obedience.

I. **MOTIVES** to filial obedience. Gratitude should lead the child to obey the parent, to whom he owes so very much. The constraint should be the sweet constraint of love. Reason should lead to the reflection—The parent has experience of human life, in which I am necessarily lacking; is not a parent's judgment far more likely to be sound than is a child's, or even a youth's? Divine legislation commands children to obey their parents. *E. g.* the fifth commandment, under the old covenant; apostolical admonitions, under the new. The example of the Holy Child, Jesus!

II. **THE ADVANTAGES** of filial obedience. Usually, obvious temporal advantages ensue upon such a course. This is proverbial and unquestionable. The satisfaction of a good conscience is a compensation not to be despised for any sacrifice of personal feeling in this matter. The approval of God is most emphatically pronounced upon those who honour and obey their parents. And this is usually followed by the confidence and admiration of fellow-men.

Lessons:—1. Expostulate with the disobedient. 2. Encourage the obedient.—T.

Ver. 7.—*The joy of harvest.* There is brightness and pleasantness in the view this passage gives us of a harvest-time in the vale of Bethlehem. Poets and painters have interpreted the heart of humanity in the pictures and the songs in which they have represented "the joy of harvest." Boaz, the mighty man of wealth, was not only rich and prosperous—he was happy, and free from the moroseness which sometimes accompanies riches; he was generous, and free from the miserliness and penuriousness which often grows with prosperity; he was considerate, and observed and recognised individual cases of need.

I. **IT IS RIGHT TO PARTAKE OF THE BOUNTIES OF GOD'S PROVIDENCE.** Gluttony and drunkenness meet with no encouragement from this, or from any other portion of Scripture. But no countenance is given to asceticism. God "daily loadeth us with benefits;" he giveth not only seed to the sower, but "bread to the eater." We should eat, drink, and give thanks to him who "openeth his hand and satisfieth the wants of every living thing." Sincerity and thoughtfulness should accompany the daily blessing and breaking of bread. Christ "came eating and drinking."

II. **IT IS RIGHT TO BE HAPPY AND MIRTHFUL WHEN GOD HAS DEALT BOUNTIFULLY WITH US.** There is mirth of a kind attending the carousals and the debaucheries of sinners. This mirth is hollow, and will soon be succeeded by regrets. But when God's children sit at their Father's table and partake of his bounty, what more natural and just than that they should rejoice and sing aloud of his goodness? These gifts and "all things" are theirs!

III. **IT IS RIGHT TO REST WHEN DUTY HAS BEEN FULFILLED AND TASKS ACHIEVED.** Some zealous Christians seem to think all repose is sinful, as manifesting indifference to the magnitude of the work to be done. But God has made the body so that it needs rest, the mind so that it needs relaxation. The quality of the work will not suffer, but will gain, by timely and moderate repose.—T.

Ver. 10.—*Benediction.* A blessing comes appropriately from a senior; a father blesses his son, a venerable patriarch his youthful colleague. Boaz was an elderly man, and it seems appropriate that, addressing Ruth, the young widow of his kinsman, he should use language of benediction: "Blessed be thou of the Lord, my daughter!"

I. **BENEDICTION PROCEEDS FROM A BENEVOLENT DISPOSITION.** It is the opposite of cursing. Sometimes language of benediction is used when there is no spiritual reality behind it. In such cases it is a mockery, a counterfeit of benevolence and piety.

II. **BENEDICTION IMPLIES PIETY.** Belief in God, and in God's willingness to bless. There is a looking up to God on behalf of him who is to be blessed. Without this the language of blessing is meaningless.

III. **BENEDICTION IS THE ACKNOWLEDGMENT THAT FROM GOD ALL GOOD MUST COME, COMBINED WITH THE DESIRE AND PRAYER THAT HE WILL BE GRACIOUS.** It is the hallow-

ing of our best affections; it is the making real and personal of our most solemn religious beliefs.

IV. **BENEDICTION, IF HARMONIOUS WITH GOD'S WILL, SECURES GOD'S FAVOUR.** It is a wish, but a wish realised; a prayer, but a prayer heard and answered in heaven.—T.

Ver. 11.—*A virtuous woman.* The circumstances of the narrative read strangely to us. But one nation and one age cannot fairly apply its standards to another. Nothing is more certain than that the conduct of Naomi, of Ruth, and of Boaz was perfectly correct, and probably Ruth's proceeding was wise and justifiable. Upon her character no breath of suspicion rested; she was, in the language of the text, "a virtuous woman."

I. **RUTH'S VIRTUE WAS MANIFESTED BY HER CIRCUMSPECT CONDUCT WITH REFERENCE TO YOUNG MEN.** "Thou followedst not young men, whether rich or poor."

II. **HER VIRTUE WAS APPARENT IN HER OBEDIENCE TO HER MOTHER-IN-LAW.** Instead of taking counsel of her own comparative inexperience, she listened to the advice of the sage and prudent Naomi.

III. **HER VIRTUE WAS ACKNOWLEDGED BY ALL HER ACQUAINTANCE.** "All the city of my people doth know." If there had been anything in the conduct of the poor, friendless young foreigner inconsistent with virtue, it would not have been hid. She escaped calumny.

IV. **HER VIRTUE LED TO AN HONOURABLE MARRIAGE AND POSITION IN ISRAEL.** "A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband." We can believe that Ruth verified the beautiful description given in Prov. xxxi.—T.

Vers. 12, 13.—*Respect for others' rights.* The situation in which Boaz found himself was very singular. All that he had heard and all that he had observed of this young Moabitess had impressed him favourably. His language and his conduct show that Ruth had made an impression upon his heart. And it was honourable to him that it was so. Her youth, her beauty, her misfortunes, her industry, her cheerfulness, her filial devotedness, her virtue, her piety, all commended her to the judgment and the affections of the upright and conscientious Boaz. And now, with the most perfect modesty, and in the presentation of an undoubted claim upon him, Ruth offered herself to him as his lawful, rightful wife. What hindered him from immediately complying with her request, and taking her to his heart and his home? There was one impediment. Another had, if he chose to exercise it, a prior claim. Another had the first right to redeem the field of Elimelech, and to espouse the heiress, and raise up seed to the departed. And until this person—the nameless one—had exercised his option, Boaz did not feel at liberty to act upon the suggestion of his heart.

I. **PERSONAL FEELINGS ALWAYS INCREASE THE URGENCY OF THE CLAIMS OF SELFISHNESS.** "By nature and by practice" men seek their own interest. But experience shows us that strong emotion increases the danger of our yielding to such impulses.

II. **WHERE PERSONAL FEELINGS ARE CONCERNED THERE IS NEED OF WATCHFULNESS AND PRAYER.** It is so easy to wrong others for the sake of our own gratification, that it is well to question the arguments and pleas by which our interests are commended. Boaz must have been tempted, in the circumstances, to say nothing about the nearer kinsman, but quietly to accept the proposal of Ruth.

III. **TRUE PRINCIPLE, AIDED BY THE POWER OF RELIGION, WILL ENABLE A MAN TO DO THE RIGHT, EVEN THOUGH HIS OWN INTERESTS AND HIS OWN FEELINGS ARE OPPOSED TO SUCH A COURSE.** Boaz gained the victory over himself, and consented to abide the issue of an appeal to the nearer kinsman, although he risked thereby the loss of Ruth. Many of the highest illustrations of the nobility possible to man turn upon some such situation, and the course which honour and virtue prescribe is the course in which true and lasting happiness will be found.—T.

Vers. 15—17.—*Generosity.* Boaz was "a mighty man of wealth," and Naomi and Ruth were poor, widowed, friendless, and comparatively strangers. All through the narrative Boaz appears as thoughtful, liberal, unselfish, honourable, munificent. He is an example to those whom Providence has endowed with wealth.

I. WEALTH IS GIVEN TO THE RICH not for their own sake only, but FOR THE SAKE OF OTHERS. Men are not the owners, but the stewards, of their possessions. How imperfectly this truth is recognised! The only way in which we can give to Christ is by giving to his people.

II. GENEROSITY SHOULD BE PROPORTIONATE TO THE MEANS OF THE GIVER. Both his means absolutely and his means relatively, i. e. considering the claims upon him by virtue of his family, his position, &c.

III. GENEROSITY SHOULD BE PROPORTIONATE TO THE NEEDS OF THE RECIPIENT. Those should have the preference who are old, crippled, and helpless; the widow and the orphan.

IV. GENEROSITY SHOULD BE UNOSTENTATIOUS AND SYMPATHETIC in its spirit. "Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth." Hardness of manner may spoil beneficence. "Rich gifts wax poor when givers prove unkind."—T.

Ver. 18.—*Sit still!* Naomi showed in her whole conduct not only tender feeling and sympathy, and sincere piety, but much shrewdness, foresight, tact, and knowledge of human nature. When there was anything for Ruth to do she was forward in urging her to action. But she knew that there is always a time to wait, as well as a time to work; and she reminded Ruth that now events must be left to others—indeed, must be left to God!

I. The OCCASION for sitting still. According to some, the belief that God works is inconsistent with the obligation to work ourselves. The whole idea of the religious life, as apprehended by some mistaken minds, is to do nothing, and to leave God to do everything. And some, who do not go so far as this, still are blind to the privilege of being "workers together with God." When we have done our part, then is the time to sit still. The workman has first to labour, then to rest. The day of toil comes first, and the night of repose follows. When we can do no more, then is the time to sit still. Ask yourself whether you have or have not this reason for refraining from effort. We sometimes come to the end of our ability; we have done our part, and for us nothing now remains to do.

II. MOTIVES which should induce thus to sit still. We have to consider that in certain cases to do otherwise would be utterly useless. In these cases it is a waste of power to make further effort, and a waste of feeling to allow anxiety to distress the heart. Thus any other course would be injurious, would destroy or disturb our peace of mind. And there are occasions when to be quiet is to trust in the providential rule and care of God. So it was with Ruth at this conjuncture. The example of Christ should not be overlooked. There came a time when he was silent before his foes.

III. The BLESSING which follows sitting still. 1. Peace of heart. "Rest in the Lord." 2. Strength. "Your strength is to sit still." "In quietness and confidence shall be your strength." 3. If God will, prosperity. "He shall give thee thy heart's desire." 4. In any case the glory of God, who desires that his people should do his will, and leave results to him.—T.

Ver. 1.—*Thoughtful love.* "Shall not I seek rest for thee?" How natural. We cannot ever be with those we love. Marriage is God's own ideal, and it is the happiest estate if his fear dwells in our hearts.

I. THERE IS NO EARTHLY REST LIKE THE REST OF HOME. Judges, warriors, statesmen enjoy the honours of life, and are conscious of pleasure in promotion and distinction, but their biographies tell us how they turn to home as the highest joy of all. Yes! Nothing can compensate for the loss of a happy home, and we should seek in every way to make it a refreshment and a delight by doing our best to promote its peace and purity.

II. THE EARTHLY HOME IS A PARABLE OF HEAVEN. Our Saviour touches our hearts at once when he says, "My Father's house," and when he speaks the exquisite parable of the prodigal son. No analogies of city or temple are so powerful in their influence over us as the analogy of home.—W. M. S.

Ver. 2.—*The work of winnowing.* "Behold, he winnoweth barley to-night." A world-old process this, the winnowing of the chaff from the wheat. Customs change,

and commercial life increases and creates ever new demands; but the agricultural life is still the basis of all. You may make new threshing-machines, but you must still have *bread*. It may be winnowed by steam or hand, but it must be *winnowed*. A pleasant Eastern sight: work done in the cool of the evening—"to-night."

I. WORK IS EVER ASSOCIATED BY GOD WITH HIS BLESSINGS TO MAN. We must plant and dig and reap. God sends the sunshine, the sweet air, and the shower. If a man will not work, neither shall he eat. A paradise of idlers would soon be a Gehenna indeed. No curse can come to a nation so sad as this: "Abundance of idleness was in her sons and her daughters."

II. WORK IS NEVER UNDIGNIFIED OR TO BE DISDAINED. A gentleman is gentle in his work—not because he does no work. It is a false pride that dislikes handiwork. Many of the diseases which darken the brain come from the unwise neglect of physical exercise. What is sweeter than the fragrance of the upturned soil? What is more beneficent than the law of labour, which calls forth the exercise of body, mind, and spirit?

III. WORK OF WINNOWING IS A DIVINE WORK ALSO. God uses his *tribulum* in our history, and the tribulation-work produces experience, patience, hope. When we are mourning over some sorrow or loss, it is the bruising flail of God's correction. And this comes at *all seasons* of life, even in the evening of the day. For we shall need chastisement even unto the end. What a doom is *that* "without chastisement."—W. M. S.

Ver. 11.—*Above rubies*. "A virtuous woman." Here is the crown of all beauty. What a renown is this of Ruth's. No jewelled necklet, no Eastern retinue, can give such attraction as this. We may have women of genius, and we admire genius; we may have women of scientific attainment, and God has given no lack of intellectual endowments to women; but we *must* have virtue. Let the history of later Rome tell us what the loss of this is.

I. NO LIFE IS HIDDEN. "All the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman." Every history stands revealed. Concerning Nehemiah, we read of the testimony given in time of national trouble: "There is a man in thy kingdom in whose heart is the fear of the holy God." And so this simple-hearted Ruth, who had not tried to make herself attractive to the young men, poor or rich, who had been modest in manner and heroic in conduct, left the impress of her character on the city.

II. NO LIFE CAN BE RELIGIOUS THAT IS NOT VIRTUOUS. We may, indeed, have virtue of a kind, a morality of respectability, without religion; but we cannot be religious without morality, for religion does not consist in ceremonies however impressive, or days however sacred, or opinions however sound; but in a life of consecration to God, and of obedience to all the sanctities of the moral law. There may be a religion of emotionalism merely; but blessed as it is to feel the true, we must live it out as well in common life.

III. NO POWER IS SO PERMANENT AS THAT OF HOLY LIFE. Character lives in others. We do not die when we pass from earth. Ruth lives to-day. It would be interesting to know how many have been led even in this age to devoutness and decision by the remembrance of her conduct and the exquisite pathos of her words. The little "city" of which our text speaks has passed away, but wherever the word of God is known and read, there Ruth reproduces herself in the history of others. The very name has become a family name, and is honoured by constant use in every generation.—W. M. S.

Ver. 12.—*Woman's influence*. In all history woman has held a place of regal influence. Not by intruding on the sphere of man, not by acting as if there were no Divine providence in the more delicate physical constitution of woman which incapacitates her for the strain of hardest toil; but in the ideal of "home," in which she is to be the "abiding" one, filling it with the charm of quiet influence and the sacredness of self-sacrificing love.

I. HERE IS A STRANGE CONJUNCTION OF TERMS. "Virtuous" comes from the Latin *vir*, which means a man. What then? Is a woman to be like a man? Does it mean a manly woman? In one sense it does. For "the man" is taken in the

Scripture as the type of humanity in its best estate. "Show thyself a man," says David to Solomon. It means all that is pure, and brave, and true, and good. Thus "abominable" means something *ab homo*, to be designated as "away from a man;" something altogether alien to his nature. A virtuous woman is a woman who has strength of resistance to evil, strength of devotion to God, strength of patience and endurance in the path of obedience.

II. HERE IS THE POWER OF INFLUENCE. "All the people of my city (or, at the gate) doth know that thou art a virtuous woman." Certainly. "They that be otherwise cannot be hid." What a lesson that is! Character tells everywhere. You may not note the current running, but place your boat upon it, and you soon *see* it. So it is with a good life—it bears others in its current. We are all known. Men and women are judged at their true worth even in this world, and even the wicked respect the upright and the just. It was said of Nehemiah to the king in a time of trouble, "There is a man in thy kingdom in whose heart is the fear of the holy God."

III. HERE IS THE SECRET OF NATIONAL GLORY. It was so in Rome when they could speak with pride of the Roman matron, and it has been so in every nation under heaven. A Divine judgment was needed to purify this nation after the days of Charles II. Had it not been a time of judgment, the nation, as Charles Kingsley says, would have perished. Let the young be taught modesty even in dress and demeanour. Let all that is "fast" be frowned upon and made unfashionable. The grace that Christ gives is humility with the fear of the Lord.—W. M. S.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER IV.

Ver. 1.—And Boaz went up to the gate, and sat there. He "went up," for the city stood, as it still stands, on a ridge (see on ch. i. 1; iii. 6). "And sat there," on one of the stones, or stone benches, that were set for the accommodation of the townsfolk. The gateway in the East often corresponded, as a place of meeting, to the forum, or the market-place, in the West. Boaz had reason to believe that his kinsman would be either passing out to his fields, or passing in from his threshing-floor, through the one gate of the city. And lo, the kinsman of whom Boaz had spoken was passing; and he said, Ho, such a one! turn hither and sit here. And he turned and sat down. Boaz called his kinsman by his name; but the writer does not name him, either because he could not, or because he would not. The phrase "such a one," or "so and so," is a purely idiomatic English equivalent for the purely idiomatic Hebrew phrase *כֹּה־וְכֵן*. A literal translation is impossible. The Latin *N. N.* corresponds.

Ver. 2.—And he took ten men of the elderly inhabitants of the city, and he said, Sit ye here; and they sat down. Boaz wished to have a full complement of witnesses to the important transaction which he contemplated.

Ver. 3.—And he said to the kinsman, Naomi, who has returned from the land of Moab, has resolved to sell the portion of land which belonged to our brother Elimelech. Boaz, it is evident, had talked over

with Ruth the entire details of Naomi's plans, and could thus speak authoritatively. Naomi, we must suppose, had previously taken Ruth into full confidence, so that Boaz could learn at second-hand what in other circumstances he would have learned from Naomi herself. The verb which we have rendered "has resolved to sell," is literally "has sold," and has been so rendered by many expositors, inclusive of Riegler and Wright. The Syriac translator gives the expression thus, "has sold to me." The subsequent context, however, makes it evident that the property had not been sold to any one, and consequently not to Boaz. The perfect verb is to be accounted for on the principle explained by Driver when he says, "The perfect is employed to indicate actions, the accomplishment of which lies indeed in the future, but is regarded as dependent upon such an unalterable determination of the will that it may be spoken of as having actually taken place: thus a resolution, promise, or decree, especially a Divine one, is very frequently announced in the perfect tense. A striking instance is afforded by Ruth (iv. 3) when Boaz, speaking of Naomi's determination to sell her land, says *מָכְרָהּ* (*מָכַר*), literally, 'has sold' (has resolved to sell. The English idiom would be 'is selling')." ('Treatise on the Use of the Tenses in Hebrew,' pp. 13, 14). In King James's English version the verb is thus freely rendered "selleth." Luther's version is equivalent—*but sel*, "offers for sale;" or, as Coverdale renders it, "offereth to sell." Vatable freely renders it as we

have done, "has determined to sell" (*vendere decrevit*); so Drusius (*vendere instituit*). The kind family feeling of Boaz, shining out in the expression, "our brother Elimelech," is noteworthy. "Brother" was to him a homely and gracious term for "near kinsman."

Ver. 4.—And I said (to myself). There is little likelihood in the opinion of those who maintain, with Rosenmüller, that the expression, "I said," refers to a promise which Boaz had made to Ruth (see ch. iii. 13). It is a primitive phrase to denote internal resolution. There is a point where thought and speech coalesce. Our words are thoughts, and our thoughts are words. I will uncover thine ear, that is, "I will lift the locks of hair that may be covering the ear, so as to communicate something in confidence." But here the phrase is employed with the specific import of secrecy dropt out. It is thus somewhat equivalent to "I will give thee notice;" only the following expression *וְאָמַרְתִּי*, i. e. to say, must be read in the light of the undiluted original phrase, "I will uncover thine ear to say." The whole expression furnishes the most beautiful instance imaginable of the primary meaning of *וְאָמַרְתִּי*. The thing that was to be said follows immediately, viz., Acquire it, or Buy it. It is as if he had said, "Now you have a chance which may not occur again." It is added, in the presence of the inhabitants. This, rather than "the assessors," is the natural interpretation of the participle (*בְּפָנֵי הָעָם*). It is the translation which the word generally receives in the very numerous instances in which it occurs. There was, so to speak, a fair representation of the inhabitants of the city in the casual company that had assembled in the gateway. And in presence of the elders of my people. The natural "aldermen," or unofficial "senators," whose presence extemporised for the occasion a sufficient court of testators. If thou wilt perform the part of a kinsman, perform it. The translation in King James's English version, and in many other versions, viz., "If thou wilt redeem it, redeem it," is somewhat out of harmony with the nature of the case. Naomi was not wishing Elimelech's estate to be redeemed. It was not yet in a position to be redeemed. It had not been alienated or sold. She wished for it not a redeemer, but a purchaser. And as it was the right of a *גִּבּוֹר* or kinsman to redeem for a reduced brother, if he was able and willing, the estate which had been sold to an alien (Levit. xxv. 25), so it was the privilege of the same *גִּבּוֹר* or kinsman to get, if the reduced brother was wishing to sell, the first

offer of the estate. It would, in particular, be at variance with the prerogative of the nearest of kin if some other one in the circle of the kindred, but not so near, were to be offered on sale the usufructuary possession of the family estate (Levit. xxv. 23, 27). Hence Boaz recognised the prior prerogative of his anonymous relative and friend, and said to him, "If thou wilt perform the part of a kinsman, and buy the property, then buy it." It is added, and if he will not. Note the use of the third person *he*, instead of the second *thou*. If the reading be correct, then Boaz, in thus speaking, must for the moment have turned to the witnesses so as to address them. That the reading is correct, notwithstanding that some MSS. and all the ancient versions exhibit the verb in the second person, is rendered probable by the very fact that *it is the difficult reading*. There could be no temptation for a transcriber to substitute the third person for the second; there would be temptation to substitute the second for the third. The unanimity of the ancient versions is probably attributable to the habit of neglecting absolute literality, and translating according to the sense, when the sense was clear. Boaz, turning back instantaneously to his relative, says, Make thou known to me, that I may know, for there is none besides thee to act the kinsman's part (with the exception of myself), and I come after thee. The little clause, "with the exception of myself," lies in the sense, or spirit, although not in the letter of Boaz's address, as reported in the text. And he said, I will act the kinsman's part. He was glad to get the opportunity of adding to his own patrimonial possession the property that had belonged to Elimelech, and which Naomi, in her reduced condition, wished to dispose of. So far all seemed to go straight against the interests of Ruth.

Ver. 5.—And Boaz said, In the day when thou acquirest the land from the hand of Naomi, and from Ruth the Moabitess, (in that day) thou hast acquired the wife of the deceased, to establish the name of the deceased upon his inheritance. So we would punctuate and render this verse. Boaz distinctly informed his relative that if the land was acquired at all by a kinsman, it must be acquired with its living appurtenance, Ruth the Moabitess, so that, by the blessing of God, the Fountain of families, there might be the opportunity of retaining the possession of the property in the line of her deceased husband, that line coalescing in the line of her second husband. It was the pleasure of Naomi and Ruth, in offering their property for sale, to burden its acquisition, on the part of a kinsman, with the condition specified. If there should be fruit after the

marriage, the child would be heir of the property, just as if he had been Machlon's son, even though the father should have other and older sons by another wife.

Ver. 6.—And the kinsman said, I am not able to perform, for myself, the kinsman's part, lest I should destroy my inheritance. Perform thou, for thyself, the kinsman's part devolving on me, for I am not able to perform it. The moment that Ruth was referred to, as the inseparable appurtenance of Elimelech's estate, a total change came over the feelings of the anonymous relative and the spirit of his dream. He "could not," so he strongly put it, perform the kinsman's part. The probability is that he already had a family, but was a widower. This being the state of the case, it followed that if he should acquire Ruth along with her father-in-law's property, there might be an addition, perhaps a numerous addition, to his family; and if so, then there would be more to provide for during his lifetime, and at his death an increased subdivision of his patrimony. This, as he strongly put it, would be to "destroy" his patrimony, inasmuch as it might be frittered into insignificant fractions. There can be no reference, as the Chaldee Targumist imagined, to his fear of domestic dissensions. Or, if he did indeed think of such a casualty, he certainly did not give the idea expression to Boaz and the assessors. Cassel takes another view. "It must be," he says, "her Moabitish nationality that forms the ground, such as it is, of the kinsman's refusal. Elimelech's misfortunes had been popularly ascribed to his emigration to Moab; the death of Chilion and Machlon to their marriage with Moabitish women. This it was that had endangered their inheritance. The *gōlî* fears a similar fate. He thinks that he ought not to take into his house a woman, marriage with whom has already been visited with the extinguishment of a family in Israel." But if this had been what he referred to when he spoke of the "destruction" of his inheritance, it was not much in harmony with the benevolence which he owed to Boaz, and to which he so far gives expression in the courtesy of his address, that he should have gratuitously urged upon his relative what he declined as dangerous for himself. The expressions "for myself" and "for thyself" (אני and אתך) are significant. The anonymous relative does not conceal the idea that it would be only on the ground of doing what would be for *his own interest* that he could entertain for consideration the proposal of Naomi. He likewise assumed that if Boaz should be willing to act the kinsman's part, it would be simply because it could be turned to account for *his own*

interest. He did not know that there was in Boaz's heart a love that truly "seeketh not her own," but in honour prefers the things of another.

Ver. 7.—And this was formerly a custom in Israel, on occasion of surrendering rights of kinship, or of selling and buying land, in order to confirm any matter; a man drew off his shoe and gave it to the other contracting party. This was attestation in Israel. We give a free translation. The custom was significant enough. He who sold land, or surrendered his right to act as a kinsman in buying land, intimated by the symbolical act of taking off his shoe, and handing it to his friend, that he freely gave up his right to walk upon the soil, in favour of the person who had acquired the possession. Corresponding symbolical acts, in connection with the transfer of lands, have been common, and probably still are, in many countries. No doubt the shoe, after being received, would be immediately returned.

Ver. 8.—And the kinsman said to Boaz, Acquire for thyself; and drew off his shoe. On the instant that he said, "Acquire for thyself," viz., the land with its living appurtenant, he drew off his shoe and presented it. Josephus allowed his imagination to run off with his memory when, mixing up the historical case before us with the details of the ancient Levirate law (Deut. xxv. 7—9), which were, in later times at all events, more honoured in the breach than in the observance, he represents Boaz as "bidding the woman loose the man's shoe and spit in his face." The actual ceremony was not an insult, but a graphic and inoffensive attestation. Yet it gradually wore out and was superseded. No vestige of it remained in the days of the writer, and the Chaldee Targumist seems to have been scarcely able to realise that such a custom could ever have existed. He represents the anonymous kinsman as drawing off his "right-hand glove" and handing it to Boaz. But take note of the German word for "glove," viz., *Handschuh* (a *hand-shoe*).

Ver. 9.—And Boaz said to the elders and all the people, Ye are witnesses this day that I have acquired the whole estate of Elimelech, and the whole estate of Chilion and Machlon, from the hand of Naomi. It is absolutely necessary that, at this part of the narrative, as well as in several other portions, we read "between the verses." Naomi, either personally or by representative, must have appeared on the scene, to surrender her territorial rights and receive the value of the estate that had belonged to her husband. But the writer merges in his account these coincidents, and hastens on to the consummation of his story. In the twofold expres-

sion, "the whole estate of Elimelech, and the whole estate of Chilion and Machlon," there is a kind of legal particularity. There was of course but one estate, but there was a succession in the proprietorship.

Ver. 10.—And likewise Ruth the Moabitess, wife of Machlon, have I acquired to myself to wife, to establish the name of the deceased upon his inheritance, so that the name of the deceased may not be cut off from among his brethren, and from the gate of his place: ye are witnesses this day. This, to Boaz, would be by far the most delightful part of the day's proceedings. His heart would swell with manly pride and devout gratitude when he realised, amid all the cumbrous technicalities of old Hebrew law, that Ruth was his. And he would rejoice all the more, as, in virtue of her connection with Machlon and Elimelech, both of their names would still be encircled with honour, and might, by the blessing of Yahveh, be linked on distinguishingly and lovingly to future generations. Note the expression, "that the name of the deceased may not be cut off from among his brethren, and from the gate of his place." The people who assembled at the gate might on some future day be able to say, "This boy is the heir of Machlon and Elimelech, who once migrated to Moab."

Ver. 11.—And all the people who were in the gateway, and the elders, said, Witnesses! May Yahveh grant that the wife who has come into thy house may be as Rachel and Leah, who built, the two of them, the house of Israel! The people of the city in general, and the venerable elders in particular, were pleased with every step that Boaz had taken. They felt that he had acted a truly honourable part, at once in reference to Naomi, and to Ruth, and to the nearest kinsman, and likewise in reference to themselves as the representatives of the general population. Blessings rose up within their hearts, ascended into heaven, and came down—charged with something Divine as well as something human and humane—in showers upon his head, and upon the head of his bride. When they prayed that the woman who was the choice of their fellow-citizen's heart should be as Rachel and Leah, they simply gave expression to the intensest desire that Israelites could cherish in reference to an esteemed sister. When they spoke of Rachel and Leah—the mothers of Israel—as "building up the house of Israel," they first of all compared the people to a household, and then they passed over from the idea of a household to the idea of a house as containing the household. They added, more particularly in reference to Boaz himself, *Do thou manfully in Ephratah*. The expression is somewhat

peculiar, ringing changes on the peculiar and remarkable term that occurs both in ch. ii. 1 and in ch. iii. 11. The expression is *לְפָרָתָא*. The people meant, "Act thou the part of a strong, substantial, worthy man." They added, in a kind of enthusiastic exclamation, Proclaim thy name in Bethlehem. They had, however, no reference to any verbal proclamation, or tribute of self-applause. The spirit of ideality had seized them. They meant, "Act the noble part—the part that will without voice proclaim in Bethlehem its own intrinsic nobleness."

Ver. 12.—And may thy house be as the house of Phares, whom Tamar bare to Judah, (springing) from the seed which Yahveh will give to thee of this young woman! Pharez's descendants, the Pharezites, were particularly numerous, and hence the good wishes of Boaz's fellow-townsmen (see Num. xxvi. 20, 21).

Ver. 13.—And Boaz took Ruth, and she became to him his wife; and he went in to her, and Yahveh gave her conception, and she bore a son.

Ver. 14.—And the women said to Naomi, Blessed be Yahveh, who has given thee a kinsman this day! May his name become famous in Israel. Of course it is Ruth's son who is the kinsman referred to, the nearest kinsman, still nearer than Boaz. The kinsman was given, said the women, "this day," the day when the child was born. The expression which we have rendered, "who has given thee a kinsman," is, literally, "who has not caused to fail to thee a kinsman." The sympathetic women who had gathered together in Boaz's house were sanguine, or at least enthusiastically desirous, that a son so auspiciously given, after most peculiar antecedents, would yet become a famous name in Israel. Canon Cook supposes that the kinsman referred to by the women was not the child, but his father, Boaz ('Speaker's Commentary, *in loc.*'). Yet it is obvious that the kinsman specified was the one who, as they said, had been given, or had not been caused to fail, "that day." He was, moreover, the one of whom they went on to say, "May his name become famous in Israel, and may he be to thee a restorer of life, and for the support of thine old age," &c. Dr. Cook's objections are founded on a too narrow view of the functions devolving on, and of the privileges accruing to, a *gōel*.

Ver. 15.—And may he be to thee a restorer of life, and for the support of thine old age: for thy daughter—in-law, who loved thee, hath borne him, and she is better to thee than seven sons. The number seven suggested an idea of fulness, com-

pleteness, perfection. The whole inhabitants of the city knew that Ruth's love to her mother-in-law had been indeed transcendent, and also that it had been transcendently returned.

Ver. 16.—And Naomi took the boy, and placed him in her bosom, and she became his foster-mother. She became his nurse in chief.

Ver. 17.—And the women, her neighbours, named the child, saying, A son has been born to Naomi; and they called his name Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David. "Obed," if a participle of the Hebrew verb *עָבַד*, naturally means *serving* or *servant*. No other derivation, apparently, can at present be assumed (but see Raabe's 'Glossar.'). Josephus gives the participial interpretation as a matter of course, and Jerome too. If the objective correlate of the servitude referred to were Yahveh, then the word might be equivalent to *worshipper*. If the name, however, as seems to be the case, was imposed first of all by the matronly neighbours who had come to mingle their joys with those of the mother, and of the grandmother in particular, then it is not likely that there would be an overshadowing reference, either on the one hand to servitude in relation to Yahveh, or on the other to servitude in the abstract. Something simpler would be in harmony with their unsophisticated, impressible, and purely matronly minds. It is not at all unlikely that, in fondling the welcome "New-come," and congratulating the overjoyed grandmother, they would, with Oriental luxuriance of speech and Oriental overflow of demonstrativeness, speak of the 'lad' as come home to be a faithful *little servant* to his most excellent grandmother. The infirmities of advancing age, aggravated by anxieties many, griefs many, bereavements many, toils many, privations many, disappointments many, had been one after another accumulating on "the dear old lady." But now a sealed fountain of reviving waters had been opened in the wilderness. Might it for many years overflow! Might the oasis around it widen and still widen, till the whole solitary place should be blossoming as the rose! Might the lively little child be spared to minister, with bright activity and devotedness, to the aged pilgrim for the little remainder of her journey! The word which the sympathetic neighbours, with not the least intention to propose a real name, had been affectionately bandying

about, while fondling the child, was accepted by Boaz and Ruth. They would say to one another, "Yes, just let him be little *Obed* to his loving grandmother." Naomi, soothed in all her motherly and grandmotherly longings and aspirations, would seem to have yielded, resolving, we may suppose, to train the child up to be a *servant of Yahveh*.

Vers. 18—22.—And these are the lineal descendants of Phares. Phares begat Hesron, and Hesron begat Ram, and Ram begat Amminadab, and Amminadab begat Nahshon, and Nahshon begat Salmon, and Salmon begat Boaz, and Boaz begat Obed, and Obed begat Jesse, and Jesse begat David. This is the genealogy of King David, and it is therefore an integral part of the genealogy of King David's great descendant, his "Lord" and ours. As such it is incorporated entire in the two tables that are contained respectively in the first chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew, and the third of the Gospel according to Luke. Some of the names are somewhat Grecised and otherwise modified in those New Testament tables. Instead of Hesron we have Esrom; instead of Ram we have Aram; instead of Nahshon we have Naason; instead of Boaz we have Boos; in 1 Chron. ii. 11 we have Salma instead of Salmon. It has been keenly debated by chronologists and genealogists whether we should regard the list of David's lineal ancestors, given here and in 1 Chron. ii. 10—12, as also in Matt. i. 3—5, and Luke iii. 31—33, as complete. It is a thorny question to handle, and one not ready to be finally settled till the whole Old Testament chronology be adjusted. It is certain that in the larger tables of our Lord's genealogy there was, apparently for mnemonic purposes (Matt. i. 17), the mergence of certain inconspicuous links (see Matt. i. 8); and it would not need to be matter of wonder or concern if in that section of these tables which contains the genealogy of King David there should be a similar lifting up into the light, on the one hand, of the more prominent ancestors, and a shading off into the dark, on the other, of some who were less conspicuous. It lies on the surface of the genealogy that the loving-kindness and tender mercies of Yahveh stretch far beyond the confines of the Hebrews, highly favoured though that people was. "Is he," asks St. Paul, "the God of the Jews only? Is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes," the same apostle answers, "of the Gentiles also" (Rom. iii. 29).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—12.—*The bridal of Boaz and Ruth.* I. THERE WERE SOME OBSTACLES IN THE WAY. There were none, indeed, in Boaz's heart; it was full of pure esteem and love for Ruth. There were none in his financial circumstances; he was able to provide amply for her comfort, and for all his own necessities and conveniences. There were none in his physical condition; he had been temperate in all things, and was in the enjoyment of health and strength. Neither were there any obstacles in Ruth's heart. It had already sought for refuge under the wings of Boaz's protection and sympathy. Nor were there any in her physical, intellectual, or moral condition. She was exceptionally "capable" in every respect, and eminently virtuous and good. She was filled, and had for long been filled, with the love "that seeketh not her own things." Although reduced in circumstances, she really belonged to the very class in society in which Boaz himself was moving. Nor were there obstacles on the part of Boaz's friends on the one hand, nor on the part of Ruth's one precious friend on the other. The obstacles were technical, arising out of the legal prerogative of a third party. Boaz set himself, in full concert with Ruth and Ruth's mother-in-law, to deal with these obstacles.

II. HE DID NOT LOITER OVER THE MATTER, or protract the proceedings unfeelingly from day to day, week to week, month to month, and even year to year, until "hope deferred" ate out every atom of enthusiasm from his own spirit, and made the heart of Ruth grow "sick." He took steps, without a single day's delay, to get his prospects and the prospects of Ruth righteously settled (see vers. 1—4).

III. Yes, "RIGHTEOUSLY SETTLED." For it was not so much the simple settlement as the righteousness of it that he longed for. He would not gratify his desire to obtain Ruth—greatly as he esteemed, prized, and desired her—if he could not get her righteously and honourably. Hence the forensic scene in the gateway of the city.

IV. It is AN OLD-WORLD PICTURE that is drawn in the narrative, unveiling to view the grave, solemn manners of primitive but well-mannered times. The city had but one gate, through which, therefore, every one who went out or came in must needs pass. It would hence become the principal place of concourse for the townsfolk. It was the place of primitive marketing and bartering. It was the place of primitive judicature. It was, as it were, the senate-hall or parliament-house of the town. The elders and fathers "did congregate" there, in the presence of the casual public, to discuss the incidents that were transpiring, or the topics that were interesting the public mind. It was the place of morning and evening lounge. Boaz was careful to be early in the morning at this gateway, and immediately on arrival he took steps to secure a judicial settlement, if needed, and, at all events, a complete attestation of the facts of any nuptial arrangement that might be made. The people would begin to assemble leisurely. They would salute one another courteously. Every one would be of staid demeanour. There would be no rush, or push, or panting haste. The true Oriental likes to be self-possessed and leisurely. Some would be passing out, some passing in; but all would be ready to pause and hail one another respectfully. Kindly salutations would be directed to Boaz, and returned. It would be manifest from his countenance, from the tones of his voice, from his entire demeanour and manner, that he *meant business* that morning. See him as he moved about, stable, yet elastic, and wound up. He invites certain venerated fathers to be seated on the stone benches set in a row at the base of the city wall, as he had an affair to transact which he wished them by their presence to attest. Other citizens, meanwhile, one by one, would be arriving on the scene, some of them younger men and some older. They are grouped about. They feel that something unusual is in the air. At length there is a full conclave, and Boaz opens his case with his kinsman. It was this:—Naomi, who had so recently returned from the land of Moab, was now unfortunately in such reduced circumstances that she had resolved to sell the property which had belonged to her deceased husband. Now then was the opportunity of the nearest kinsman. In virtue of being the nearest in kinship, he was entitled to the first offer of the property. "Buy it, therefore," said Boaz, "before the inhabitants, and before the elders of my people. If thou wilt act the part of the nearest kins-

RUTH.

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man (as thou art entitled to do), then act it, and buy the property" (ver. 4). The kinsman seemed glad that he should have such an opportunity of adding to his patrimonial estate, and accordingly, in presence of the elders and other inhabitants, he heartily said, "I will act the kinsman's part." As he thus spoke there would, in all likelihood, be murmurs of applause round and round. Who could object to the kinsman getting the estate if he should offer to pay a liberal price to the reduced widow? It was, in its own little sphere of things, quite a crisis. Deep-drawing interests, affections, and desires were trembling in the balance. Boaz looked grave. But it was evident to perceptive eyes that he had not yet unfolded the whole case to view. After the briefest possible pause he resumed, and said, in the presence of the judicial conclave, "In the day when thou buyest the land from Naomi, thou must buy it not from her only, but from Ruth also, as prospective heiress; and more, thou must buy it *with Ruth at present upon it, as its inalienable appurtenant*, in order that the name of her deceased husband may, by the blessing of the God of Israel, descend with it in the line of her posterity (ver. 5). It was only for a moment that the fate of the gentle Moabitess trembled in its scale. The kinsman was not prepared to accept the property on Naomi's terms. He feared that new interests would spring up to fritter into insignificant patches the property which he already possessed. Hence he said to Boaz, in the presence of the elders and the other citizens, "I cannot act the part of the nearest kinsman; do thou it, Boaz, in my room" (ver. 6). Boaz would triumph in his heart; and so, when she became informed of the decision, would Naomi; and so would Ruth. But some legal formalities required to be observed ere the renunciation of the prerogative attaching to the nearest kinsman became absolutely binding in law. "This," says the writer, "was formerly a custom in Israel on occasion of surrendering rights of kinship, or selling and buying land, in order to confirm every matter. A man drew off his shoe and gave it to the contracting party. This was attestation in Israel" (ver. 7). Accordingly, the nearest kinsman in the case before us drew off his shoe and tendered it to Boaz, in testimony that he therewith resigned all right to walk upon the ground in question (ver. 8). After this formality had been completed, and Boaz had courteously, in presence of the assembled witnesses, returned the symbolic shoe, he seems to have sent for Naomi and Ruth, and to have finished with them, in the presence of the people, the arrangement which was the most momentous into which he had ever entered, and which promised to be big with blessing to others as well as to himself. It was not only a marriage settlement; it was a bridal ceremony. The antique benisons of the elders and the other citizens fell round him thick and fast (vers. 9—12), and that blessing which maketh rich, and to which no sorrow is added, the blessing of the God of families and of all family love, descended and crowned the union.

V. It is infinitely becoming that all things in marriage should be done "DECENTLY," "IN ORDER," and ABOVE-BOARD. Let everything clandestine be sensitively avoided. Whenever there is anything in marriage or its preliminaries that needs smothering up, the wind is sown, and the whirlwind will need to be reaped.

VI. If stable HAPPINESS AFTER MARRIAGE be desired, care should be taken to have all preliminaries duly, clearly, and righteously pre-arranged, more particularly such as have reference to possessions, money, rights, or prerogatives. There should be also, especially in these modern times, distinct preliminary arrangements regarding the chief manners and customs of the home, and the relationship that is to be sustained to Churches, and Church assemblies and ordinances. Much indeed must be left to future and incidental adjustment; but great regulative principles should be mutually settled.

VII. If, in "the estate of marriage," there be, as there should be and might be, on both sides a continual aim after whatsoever things are true, honest, seemly, honourable, just, pure, lovely, virtuous, and praiseworthy, then the light of life will shine in the home and in the heart with inexpressible sweetness and brightness. But if there be suspicion, jealousy, hard authority, tyranny, a dictatorial spirit, or any grossness, or secret faithlessness, or the neglect of courtesy, or the extinguishment of kindness and daily benevolence, if there be hard selfishness, however glitteringly glozed over with a semblance of good manners, then the light of life will be not only partially, but totally eclipsed. When the selfishness unmask itself to the full, the last feeble

flame, flickering in the socket, will die out, and be succeeded by a darkness that is the very "blackness of darkness." The true ideal of conjugal relationship is presented by St. Paul in his Epistle to the Ephesians (ch. v. 25—33). The husband's love should be as the love of Jesus to his Church. The love of the wife should be as the love of the Church to Jesus. Then the marriage is "in the Lord;" and, what is better still, the life after the marriage is life "in the Lord," and life *to the Lord*. It was from ages and generations "a great mystery," but now it is made manifest in every Christian home that is Christian indeed.

Vers. 13—22.—*Little Obed*. A birth, and in particular a first birth, in the homes of the "excellent of the earth" is always an interesting and exciting event. What multitudes of beginnings there are in childhood! What multitudes of buds and beautiful rose-buddings! What possibilities and uncertainties! What wonderful littlenesses of hands and feet, and other organs, all so marvellously harmonised and complete! What wondrous and wondering eyes, looking, and still looking, as if they would really read your very heart! What winsome smiles and early recognitions!

I. LITTLE OBED WAS A FORTUNATE CHILD. He had three great privileges. He had a good father, a good mother, and a good grandmother. What a blessing! His father was one of the most upright, most honourable, most gracious of men. His mother was "one among a thousand." She had a large heart, full of singular affection and self-denying devotedness. His grandmother was a woman with bold outline of character, but with a capability of yearning and attachment unfathomably deep.

II. If little Obed grew up, as is likely, IN THE FEAR AND FAVOUR OF GOD, then what was long afterwards said of Timothy might by some one be said of him, "I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt at first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice, and I am persuaded in thee also" (2 Tim. i. 5).

III. FROM HIS VERY BIRTH HE WOULD BE CRADLED IN LOVE, the threefold love of Ruth, Boaz, and Naomi, intertwined into a delightful unity of affection.

IV. GREAT WOULD BE THE REJOICINGS OVER HIS ADVENT. 1. Ruth would think of Machlon, and rejoice. 2. Naomi would think of Elimelech, and rejoice. 3. Boaz would think of both the deceased, and rejoice that their names were not to be cut off from among their brethren. Then again (1) Ruth would rejoice for her husband's sake, whose home would be brighter now than ever. And she would have peculiar joy for Naomi's sake, whose fondest wishes and hopes and plans had been so happily consummated. (2) Boaz would rejoice over the joy and consolation of Ruth and Naomi; and he would drink from another fountain of joy as he realised that he himself, instead of being the terminal link in the genealogical chain, might now have a place in the line of future generations. (3) Naomi would rejoice because her deepest desires had been brought up into the light, and crowned with the blessing of the Almighty. No longer was He the embitterer of her lot (ch. i. 20). Her name was true, and not to be exchanged for Mara. She was herself again "Naomi," for "sweet is Jah." His character is "sweet," his thoughts, his feelings, his plans, his ways, all are "sweet."

V. In another respect would there be peculiar rejoicings over Obed's advent. HE WAS THE MUCH LONGED-FOR HEIR OF TWO DISTINCT ESTATES. Let us hope that he would be trained up to think of the responsibilities as well as of the privileges that would come to him in virtue of being born into a good position in society.

VI. HIS NAME WOULD BE BEAUTIFULLY SIGNIFICANT TO HIM IN PROPORTION AS HIS MIND UNFOLDED AND EXPANDED. He would have various ministries to fulfil. A ministry to his grandmother. A ministry to his mother. A ministry to his father. A ministry to his dependents. A ministry to his friends and neighbours, and countrymen in general. Above all, he would have a ministry to the God of his fathers and of their children's children. It would be his business to be OBED in all relations. Even Jesus, out of all compare the greatest of his descendants, became OBED, and took upon himself "the form of a SERVANT," and took far more than the form; he came "not to be ministered unto, but to minister."

VII. It was the hope of the congratulatory matrons who fondled the welcome child, that he would be to his grandmother "a restorer of life" and "a nourisher of her old age" (ver. 15). High is the privilege of children and grand-children

thus to brighten to the aged the evening of life, when the long shadows are stretching far away. Happy they who count this a privilege!

VIII. What a charm is thrown over infant life by the action of Obed's great descendant in reference to children. He said, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven." He took them up in his arms, laid his hand upon their heads, and blessed them (Matt. xix. 14; Mark x. 14—16). At another time he called a little child to him and set him in the midst of his ambitious disciples, and said, "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. xviii. 2, 3). In this love for little children Jesus, as in so many other respects, was "the image of the invisible God." He shows us exactly what is the heart, and what are the heart affections, of God. *Such as was the visible Jesus in feelings and character, such is the invisible God.* He, therefore, he, even he, is a lover of little children, without distinction or exception.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1, 2.—*A primitive council.* The writer of this book depicts for us in this passage a very picturesque scene. We observe—1. *The place of judgment and public business.* "Judges and officers shalt thou make thee in all thy gates . . . throughout thy tribes, and they shall judge the people with just judgment." The parents of the disobedient son were to "bring him out unto the elders of his city, and unto the gate of his place." Absalom, when plotting against his father's authority, "stood beside the way of the gate," and intercepted those that came to the king for judgment. 2. The court in whose presence important business was transacted—"the elders of the city." Such elders were prescribed, as is evident from several passages in Deuteronomy; and the early books of the Old Testament contain frequent references to them and to their duties. Allusion is made to the elders of Succoth, of Jezreel, and of this same Bethlehem in the time of Samuel. Ten seems to have been what we should call a quorum. There is wisdom, gravity, deliberation, dignity, in the proceedings here recorded.

I. HUMAN SOCIETY REQUIRES INSTITUTIONS OF LAW AND JUSTICE. The relations between man and man must not be determined by chance, or left to the decision of force or fraud. "Order is Heaven's first law."

II. LAW AND JUSTICE SHOULD BE SANCTIONED BY RELIGION. Religion cannot approve of all actions done by all in authority; but it acknowledges and respects government as a Divine institution, and awakens conscience to support justice.

III. THERE ARE CERTAIN CONDITIONS IN CONFORMITY WITH WHICH PUBLIC BUSINESS SHOULD BE TRANSACTED. 1. Openness and publicity. 2. Solemn and formal ratification and record of important acts. 3. Equality of citizens before the law. 4. As much liberty as is compatible with public rights. 5. Integrity and incorruptness on the part of those who administer the law.—T.

Vers. 3—8.—*The goël.* Every nation has its own domestic and social usages. Among those prevalent in Israel was the relationship of the *goël*. He was the redeemer, or the next kinsman of one deceased, whose duty it was to purchase an inheritance in danger of lapsing, or to redeem one lapsed. The duties were defined in the Levitical law. According to the custom and regulation known as Levirate, he was expected to marry the widow of the deceased, and to raise up seed unto the dead, in case no issue were left of the marriage dissolved by death. From this Book of Ruth it is clear that the two duties, that with regard to property and that respecting marriage, centered in the same person. Failing the unnamed kinsman, it fell to the lot of Boaz to act the part of the near relative of Ruth's deceased husband. Usages and laws differ, but the fact of kindred remains, and involves many duties.

I. HUMAN KINDRED IS A DIVINE APPOINTMENT.

II. AND IS BOTH SUGGESTIVE AND ILLUSTRATIVE OF RELIGIOUS, OF CHRISTIAN TRUTH. *E. g.* of the fatherhood of God; of the brotherhood of man; based upon that of Christ.

III. KINDRED IS AT THE FOUNDATION OF HUMAN LIFE, AS SOCIAL AND POLITICAL.

IV. KINDRED INVOLVES CONSIDERATION AND REGARD.

V. AND, WHERE CIRCUMSTANCES RENDER IT EXPEDIENT, PRACTICAL HELP.

Appeal :—Do we recognise the just claims of kindred? If we do not, is not our failure traceable to an imperfect apprehension of spiritual relationships?—T.

Vers. 4, 6.—*Our own inheritance.* “Lest I mar mine own inheritance.” How many do this? They have noble inheritances, but in a multitude of ways they mar them.

I. THERE IS THE INHERITANCE OF PHYSICAL HEALTH. Most precious; not to be gotten for fine gold. Yet how often it is injured by sloth and sin, by intemperance and lust, or by the overtaxed brain, and neglect of the simple economy of health.

II. THERE IS THE INHERITANCE OF A GOOD NAME. This too is a priceless gift. More to be desired than gold, yea, than fine gold. Character. It *takes years to win*—whether for a commercial house or for a personal reputation; but it takes only a *moment to lose*. How many a son has marred his inheritance! The “good name” is irrecoverable in the highest sense. Forgiveness may ensue, but the memory of evil lives after.

III. THERE IS THE INHERITANCE OF A RELIGIOUS FAITH. “My father’s God.” Then my father *had* a God! There had been a generation to serve him before I was born! Am I to be the first to break the glorious chain, to sever the great procession? “One generation shall praise thy works to another.” How beautiful! Is *my* voice to be silent, my thought to be idle, my heart to be cold and dead to God my Saviour? Let me think of the unfeigned faith of my grandmother Lois and my mother Eunice, and not mar the inheritance through unbelief.—W. M. S.

Vers. 9—11.—*Honourable conduct honourably witnessed.* By the “shoe” in the context is meant, no doubt, the sandal, which in the East was, and is, the ordinary covering of the foot, fastened by means of a thong of leather. Although in a house, or in a temple, the sandal was dispensed with, it was always used in walking and upon a journey. It was taken off at meals, in every sacred place, and in the presence of every sacred person, and on occasion of mourning. The context brings before us a symbolical use of the sandal. In early times—for even when this book was written the custom was obsolete—it was the usage of the men of Israel, in taking possession of any landed property, to pluck off the shoe. This was the survival of a still older custom—the planting the foot upon the newly-acquired soil, outwardly and visibly to express the taking possession of it, and asserting a right to it as one’s own. Having, by the permission and at the suggestion of the unnamed kinsman, performed this simple symbolical act, Boaz proceeded to address the assembled elders of the city, calling them to witness two facts: his purchase of the field of Elimelech, and his resolve to take Ruth, the widow of Elimelech’s son, as his own wife. The elders, in presence of one another, formally and solemnly declared, We are witnesses.

I. A RELIGIOUS MAN SHOULD BE SCRUPULOUSLY HONOURABLE IN THE TRANSACTIONS OF LIFE.

II. IN NOTHING IS THIS RULE MORE IMPORTANT THAN IN QUESTIONS AFFECTING PROPERTY AND IN MARRIAGE.

III. PUBLICITY, THE PRESENCE OF COMPETENT AND VERACIOUS, HONOURABLE WITNESSES, MAY BE REGARDED AS OF THE HIGHEST IMPORTANCE. Secret marriages and underhand proceedings with regard to property are to be avoided.

IV. A PUBLIC PROFESSION OF CHRISTIANITY IN THE PRESENCE OF WITNESSES IS WISE, RIGHT, AND EXPEDIENT.—T.

Ver. 10.—*The name of the dead.* Elimelech was dead, Mahlon was dead. But to Naomi and to Ruth, who survived, and even to Boaz, the kinsmen of the deceased, the dead were sacred. Not only was their memory treasured in the hearts of the survivors; the fact that they had lived exercised an influence, and a very marked influence, over the conduct of those still living. This was human, admirable, and right.

I. THE NAME OF THE DEAD SHOULD BE SACRED IN EVERY FAMILY. We were theirs, and they are still ours—ours whilst we live. To forget them would be brutish and

inhuman. Their memory should be cherished. Their wishes, within reasonable limits, should be fulfilled. Their example, if good, should be reverently studied and diligently copied.

II. THE NAME OF THE DEAD IS A NATIONAL POSSESSION AND POWER. "One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh." But each generation inherits from its predecessor. Patriotism is fostered by the traditions of the great men who have gone, and whose memory is the national pride and glory. To us in England what inspiration does "the name of the dead" afford! The heroes, statesmen, patriots, saints, discoverers, &c. have left behind them imperishable names. "Let us now," says the apocryphal writer, "let us now praise famous men and our fathers which begat us."

III. THE NAME OF THE DEAD IS THE INSPIRATION OF THE WORLD'S LABOURS AND HOPES. All great names, save One, are names of the dead, or of those who soon will be such. One was dead, but lives again, and for evermore. His undying life gives true life and power to the great names of those whom he causes to live again; for he teaches us that nothing he has sanctified can ever die.

Query:—What shall our name be when we are with the dead?—T.

Vers. 11, 12.—*Good wishes.* When the marriage of Boaz with Ruth was resolved upon, the elders of the city, the bridegroom's neighbours and friends, expressed with cordiality their congratulations and good wishes. They wished well to himself, to his wife, to his house or family, to his offspring, his seed.

I. KIND WISHES ARE FOUNDED IN A PRINCIPLE DIVINELY PLANTED IN HUMAN NATURE. Sympathy is a principle of human nature. Benevolence is as natural as selfishness, though less powerful over most minds. And we should "rejoice with those who do rejoice."

II. IT IS RIGHT THAT KIND WISHES SHOULD BE EXPRESSED IN WORDS. There is no doubt danger lest insincerity should creep into the customary salutations and benedictions of life; many compliments are utterly insincere. Yet even the most scrupulous and veracious may legitimately utter good wishes. It is churlish to withhold such utterances.

III. CHRISTIANITY GIVES A RICH, FULL MEANING TO THE KIND WISHES OF FRIENDSHIP. For our religion teaches us to turn every wish into a prayer. It is a sufficient condemnation of a wish that it cannot take this form. With Christians, "God bless you!" should be a hearty and fervent intercession.—T.

Ver. 13.—*The birth of a son.* With true piety as well as justice the author of this book refers the blessings of domestic life to him who setteth his people in families, and of whom it is said, "Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord, and the fruit of the womb is his reward." Whenever a child is born into the world the Spirit of wisdom teaches us, as Christians, lessons of the most practical and valuable kind.

I. GRATITUDE TO GOD FOR A PRECIOUS GIFT. Christian parents feel that they receive no gifts so valuable, so dear as the children bestowed upon them by the goodness of God. Thanks are ever due for the Divine favour thus shown.

II. A SENSE OF PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY. He must be stolid and insensible indeed who, when his firstborn is placed in his arms, has no thought of the sacred charge laid upon him. Gifts are trusts. The parent's desire and prayer should be for grace to fulfil solemn responsibilities.

III. RESOLUTIONS REGARDING EDUCATION. Remembering that for the first years of life a child is almost entirely under the parents' influence, fathers and mothers will not only at the first seriously and prayerfully dedicate their offspring to God, but will consider how they may train them up in the way they should go, that when they are old they may not depart from it.

IV. A SPIRIT OF DEPENDENCE UPON "THE FATHER OF THE SPIRITS OF ALL FLESH" FOR A BLESSING. We cannot too much connect our children with the throne of grace. Private and family prayer will be the means of domestic happiness, and will assist parents in exercising a watchful care and faithful guidance, and children in using aright the opportunities of improvement with which they are favoured.—T.

Vers. 13.—*The birth-hour.* "And she bare a son." Memorable day that! Read to the end of the chapter: "There was a son born to Naomi; and they called his name Obed: he is the father of Jesse, the father of DAVID." The old divines used to consider that Ruth the Moabitess becoming an ancestor of David was a prefigurement of the admission of the Gentiles into the Christian Church. Certain it is that the Jews did think this a dishonour to David, and Shimei in his revilings is supposed to taunt David with his descent from Ruth. But the descent of the same true spirit is the real descent of honour.

I. THE CHILD'S NAME. Obed, a servant. It may be a remembrancer of duty. Just as the motto of the Prince of Wales is—"Ich dien," I serve. Any way it is beautiful never to despise *service*. A Christian is to be "meet for the Master's use." How many there are who are of no *use* in the world! Some dislike all service, and prefer the dainty hand that is never soiled, and the life that is never separated from selfishness.

II. THE BENEDICTION ON NAOMI. Naomi was there to receive congratulations. What a time for the mother in Israel to be with the new mother! There is sacred anxiety in such hours in the household. Why should the name of mother-in-law be the butt for satire? Many can testify how precious her care and kindness is in such a season. It is easy, but wicked as easy, to satirise a relationship which, if it creates responsibilities, confers also kindness which cannot be bought.

III. THE PROPHECY CONCERNING THE BABE. How soon infancy merges into youth and manhood. In a few years Naomi will be bent and bowed. The white winter of age is coming, and then this child shall be a nourisher of Naomi's old age. A desolate time indeed for those who have no children's children to brighten their declining days, and, if needful, to succour them when friend and helper are gone. But all here is traced, as in Hebrew history all is ever traced, to the good hand of God. "Blessed be the Lord, which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman."—W. M. S.

Vers. 14—17.—*The benevolent happiness of old age.* The story of Ruth closes amidst domestic prosperity and happiness, and amidst neighbourly congratulations. And it is observable that Naomi, whose trials and sorrows interest us so deeply at the commencement of this book, appears at its close radiant with renewed happiness: her daughter-in-law a mother, she herself a grand-parent, surrounded by rejoicing neighbours, expressing their congratulations, and invoking blessing upon her and those dear to her. The narrative loses sight of Ruth in picturing the felicity of her mother-in-law. The neighbours who before had asked, "Is this Naomi?" now exclaim, "There is a son born to Naomi: blessed be the Lord, which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman." She is encompassed with the blessings which, in the language of our poet, "should accompany old age"—"honour, love, obedience, troops of friends."

I. UNSELFISHNESS IS REWARDED. Naomi had all along thought more of Ruth's sorrows and of Ruth's happiness than of her own. And now this very Ruth is made the means of her prosperity, comfort, and joy in declining years.

II. HOPES ARE FULFILLED. It was Naomi's desire that Ruth might attain to "rest," and her counsels had been directed to this end. Now she sees the Moabitess a happy wife, a happy mother.

III. A JOYOUS PROSPECT IS OPENED UP. The day has been cloudy and stormy, but how brightly does the sun shine out at eventide! "A restorer of her life," "a nourisher of her old age," is given her. The child Obed becomes her delight, and her imaginations picture his manhood, and his position in an honourable line of descent.

IV. SYMPATHY ENHANCES HAPPINESS. There is mutual reaction here; Ruth, Naomi, and the neighbours, with unselfish congratulations, rejoicings, and prayers, contribute to one another's welfare.—T.

Vers. 18—22.—*The lineage of David.* This book closes with a genealogy. Readers of the Scriptures may sometimes have felt perplexed at the frequency with which genealogical tables occur both in the Old Testament and in the New. There is a sufficient reason for this.

I. SCRIPTURE SANCTIONS THE INTEREST HUMAN NATURE FEELS IN GENEALOGY. No one is insensible to his own ancestry, especially if among his progenitors have been men of eminence. Interest in ancestry may be carried too far, and may spring from, and minister to, a foolish vanity, but in itself it is good. It is a witness to the dignity of human nature; it may be an inspiration to worthy deeds; it may be an incentive to transmit influences of character and culture to posterity.

II. SCRIPTURE ATTACHES SPECIAL IMPORTANCE TO THE GENEALOGY OF THE DESCENDANTS OF ABRAHAM. Israel was the chosen people, and the lineage of the tribes of Israel, and especially of Judah, was a matter of national and local, but also of world-wide, importance.

III. SCRIPTURE CAREFULLY RECORDS THE GENEALOGY OF CHRIST JESUS. He was the Son of man, the Son of David, as well as the Son of God. By evincing this, provision was made for commending Jesus to the reverence of the Hebrew people; for making manifest the fulfilment of prophecy, which was thus authenticated; for presenting the Saviour in all the power of his true humanity before the human race, as the object of faith, attachment, and devotion.

Lessons:—1. The obligations under which we individually may be laid by a pious ancestry. 2. Our debt to posterity. 3. The claims of the Son of man upon our hearts.—T.

HOMILETICAL INDEX

TO

THE BOOK OF RUTH.

CHAPTER I.			CHAPTER III.		
THEME		PAGE	THEME		PAGE
The Emigrants and their Trials	...	4	Naomi's Maternal Solitude	...	52
On the Book of Ruth	...	5	Marriage, a Woman's Rest	...	55
A Family of Bethlehem	...	5	Diligence in Business	...	55
Famine and Impoverishment	...	6	Filial Obedience	...	55
Emigration	...	6	The Joy of Harvest	...	56
Widowhood	...	7	Benediction	...	56
Marriage	...	7	A Virtuous Woman	...	57
Double Desolation	...	8	Respect for Others' Rights	...	57
A Foreign Land	...	10	Generosity	...	57
Longing for the Old Home	...	13	Sit Still!	...	58
Kindness	...	14	Thoughtful Love	...	58
Separation	...	14	The Work of Winnowing	...	58
Home Returning	...	15	Above Rubies	...	59
Benedictions	...	15	Woman's Influence	...	59
Devoted Attachment	...	21			
Constancy	...	22	CHAPTER IV.		
Heart Wounds Re-opened	...	23	The Bridal of Boaz and Ruth	...	65
Moral Steadfastness	...	24	Little Obed	...	67
			A Primitive Council	...	68
			The Goël	...	68
			Our Own Inheritance	...	69
			Honourable Conduct Honourably Wit-		
			nessed	...	69
			The Name of the Dead	...	69
			Good Wishes	...	70
			The Birth of a Son	...	70
			The Birth-Hour	...	71
			The Benevolent Happiness of Old		
			Age	...	71
			The Lineage of David	...	71
CHAPTER II.					
The Harvest-Field	...	32			
The Gleaner	...	33			
Her Hap	...	33			
Salutations	...	34			
Filial Piety and Fidelity Recognised	...	34			
and Recompensed	...	34			
The Harvest-Field again	...	39			
Liberality to the Poor	...	40			
Home from the Harvest-Field	...	44			
Kindred and Kindness	...	45			
Harvest-Time	...	45			

121

